

# The Regent and his Daughter

by  
**DORMER CRESTON**

---

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'Just how the past should be written of . . . These accomplished pages.'

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'She writes beautifully . . . maximum wit.'

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'Those accomplished authors.'

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'Told with great restraint.'

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FOUNTAINS OF YOUTH  
THE LIFE OF  
MARIE BASHKIRTSEFF

Acc. No.	11762
Class No.	G. 10.
Book No.	456

*By the same author*

ANDROMEDA IN WIMPOLE STREET

THE REGENT AND HIS DAUGHTER





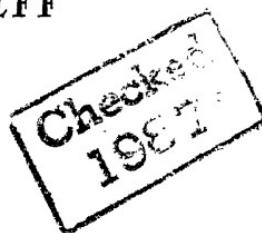
*Photo Walery, Paris.*

MARIE BASHKIRTSEFF

# FOUNTAINS OF YOUTH

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MARIE BASHKIRTSEFF

By  
DORMER CRESTON



LONDON  
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## PREFACE

In spite of the commotion caused by the publication of the *Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff* in 1887 this is the first life of her to appear in England.

The *Journal*, edited by Monsieur Theuriet, was only part of the script of her diary, and in 1925 a further instalment appeared under the title *Cahiers Intimes Inédits de Marie Bashkirtseff*. This was edited by Monsieur Pierre Borel who, both by the production of these four volumes and by other short extracts from her diary published at various dates, has done so much to give us a further insight into that egoistic but arresting and poignant character.

It is owing to Monsieur Borel's courtesy that I have been able to take extracts from *Le Visage Inconnu de Marie Bashkirtseff* and to quote so freely from the *Cahiers*, and it is from these *Cahiers* and from the original two volumes of the *Journal* that by far the greater part of my extracts are taken, myself being in all cases responsible for the translation. My thanks are due to Messrs. Cassell & Co. for permission to quote from the *Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff* and the *Lettres de Marie Bashkirtseff*. I have also to thank Monsieur Albéric Cahuet for permission to quote various small extracts from his two volumes, *Moussia* and *Moussia ses et Amies*; and Le Directeur des Musées de la ville de Nice for permission to reproduce the self portrait and the statue of Marie Bashkirtseff by Michel de Tarnowsky in the Musée des Beaux Arts, Nice.

Bashkirtseff is in Russian, Bashkirtseva, but, once in France, the family appear to have called themselves Bashkirtseff.

In this biography I have, down to the smallest details, kept scrupulously to my authorities, a full list of whom will be found at the end.

I should like to take this opportunity of thanking my former typist, Miss Grace Huitson, for her intelligent and exquisitely accurate work.

DORMER CRESTON

"I wonder," said I, "that man can toil so for a little fame" . . .  
"Dear child!" said Goethe, "a name is no despicable matter." ;

*Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann*

'His book is . . . the evanescent haze by the edge of the wood,  
the enchantment of a May morning, youth goes forth singing.'

*George Moore*

## Chapter One

### COUNTRY FAMILIES OF LITTLE RUSSIA

'What am I? . . . Nothing! What do I want to be? Everything!'

So wrote Marie Bashkirtseff at the age of fifteen. If she has not, to continue her own idiom, become everything, she has certainly become something. Let us see what precisely is her dossier of fame.

Her diary has become a recognized synonym for unabashed self-revelation: at Nice a street has been named after her, and in the Nice Museum is a Marie Bashkirtseff Room with both her portrait and statue: in the *Musée de Masséna* is a plaster cast of her waiting for sufficient funds to be cut in marble and put up at Nice: several of her own paintings are in the *Musée du Luxembourg*: she has been the subject of French biography and articles: her diary has been translated into English, German, Russian, and Hungarian: she has her own page in the literary catalogue at the British Museum, her paragraph in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Mr. Gladstone extolled her, and finally Mr. Guedalla, by publicly complaining of her, has acknowledged her importance.<sup>1</sup>

It would be interesting to know how editors of encyclopædias judge as to who is important enough to come under the heading of the famous. Does one of those winged beings, those literary muses who flit about eighteenth-century engravings graciously showing authors how to write, always stand at the elbow of these editors murmuring the names of those to be included, those excluded? The fact remains that even in encyclopædias known as 'Concise' Marie Bashkirtseff is not ousted from her place. And, apart from England, her name is to be found in the encyclopædias of the United States and South America, of France, Russia, Germany, Austria, Italy, Norway, Sweden,

<sup>1</sup> *Masters and Men*, by Philip Guedalla.

Portugal, Greece, Roumania, and Hungary. However valid or not one may consider Marie Bashkirtseff's claims to fame it would be impossible to deny that she has appropriated to herself a few laurel-leaves.

When her diary was published in France in 1887 it not only became a best seller but spread through Europe and America. 'The sensation,' wrote in 1901 a contemporary of Marie, 'the sensation of twelve years ago when the first diaries were published can hardly be repeated .... Nothing had been seen like these self-revelations before.'<sup>1</sup>

In 1888 an article appeared on her in the *Woman's World*. Then Mr. Gladstone looked through her diary: he became absorbed: he read it from cover to cover: and from the pages of *The Nineteenth Century* he made pronouncement. Her diary might be regarded, so he informed the country, as 'a book without parallel'. As for Marie herself, she was, he averred, 'a true genius, one of those abnormal beings who in this or that country seem to be born into the world once or twice in a generation.' England read his dictum, and hurried to circulating library and book-seller. The excitement grew. Other articles followed on Mr. Gladstone's: writers, artists, and psychologists all had their say: her name appeared and reappeared in magazine and newspaper, resounded from the platforms of debating society and lecture-room.

In the 'sixties, 'seventies, and 'eighties large sections of the upper and middle classes, and in particular the women, were brought up with a deformed sense of piety. Not real goodness with its great-hearted acceptance of humanity, its illimitable compassion and tenderness, but a strangulated piety, timid, puerile, ridiculous; instinct with that latent cruelty inseparable from any partial outlook. Self-repression, resignation, and intense domesticity were held up to the girlhood of the day as their noblest aims, and anaemic and breathless in their relentless corsets they tried to conform. Prayer-book in hand they hurried from Sunday School to Church, from moribund relative to bed-ridden cottager. A stream of the most insipid and enervating literature that has ever come from the English

<sup>1</sup> *Further Memoirs of Marie Bashkirtseff* (Grant Richards, 1901).

press fostered the approved mental attitude. Here between their bevelled board covers are orphans making an extraordinary pother over parents they have never known: half-witted children who after years of coaching have been heard on their death-bed to mutter the word Jesus: austere-faced men inflicting on their wives in the name of religion fifteen or sixteen children. This yearly child-bearing accounts for the ubiquitous orphan who reappears in numberless songs, more vocal than ever about the embarrassments of his position. Religiosity was a favourite occupation. By hours of diligent work a text could be induced to appear in cross-stitch on a strip of perforated cardboard suitable as a bible bookmarker: another approach to the subject was through the show in Bond Street of 'religious problem pictures' by Monsieur Doré: while at dinner parties a foretaste of Grand Guignol thrills would be achieved through discussions on Eternal Punishment.

From the pages of some of the most popular women's magazines of the day, from stories, poems, and illustrations alike rises a miasma of dreariness. In *Golden Hours* and *The Girls' Own Paper* everyone is on the brink or just over the brink, of some petty moral disaster, from which follows, in due course, Remorse, this giving the illustrator splendid opportunities to depict sinners weeping, head in hands; prone figures flung despairingly on grass; or kneeling maidens in their bedroom. The more reputable delinquents are allowed finally to receive consolation from old family servants, curates, or faithful dogs of indeterminate breed. The letterpress and illustrations abound in such titles as *Maud's Sorrow*, *The Alarmed Conscience*, *The Broken Idol, Alone, Marion's Dilemma, Mourn but do not Murmur, Queenie and George in Trouble, How to Manage Temptations, The Wounded Dove*.

‘The Cross I carry every day  
Is quite a slender one, and yet  
I move but slowly on my way’

remarks one of these heroines with surprise; but with her mind dwelling perpetually on the negative—on dilemmas, sorrows, sins, woundings, and breakings generally, it is not to be wondered at that she suffered from a deterioration of morale.

In the *Girls' Own Paper* the answers to questions further enlighten us as to the outlook of the day. 'We sympathize with you,' writes the Editor, 'on the harm done by wilfully reading an infidel book against your father's will': while another subscriber is encouraged by being told, 'We see no harm in your leisure hours to read instructive books.' So far, so good; but one who demands an occupation in life is briskly admonished: 'Do not fret at having nothing to do. Every day brings its little opportunities . . . for saying a kind word . . . or restraining a hasty temper.' As for these girls' appearance, it is made clear to them that to think of it at all is displeasing to their Creator. One of them who ventures to inquire what makes hair curl is asked, 'Have you no feeling of self-respect and maidenly reserve?' Another, anxious for a little help regarding her complexion is merely told, 'we cannot waste our space . . . answering uninteresting questions.'

Within this world of spurious values and mawkish sentiment the publication of Marie Bashkirtseff's diary had the effect of the bursting open of a hitherto bolted door. Here was a well-born and well-brought up girl demanding: 'What is the good of lying and posing?' A girl who wished above everything else to be a success, and said so; who admired the size of her own hips, and said so: who was bored by her family, and said so. Even Mr. Gladstone, entranced as he had been by this combination of Tartar blood and Parisian chic (<sup>1</sup> 'Never did any book,' wrote his friend, Dorothy Stanley, 'interest him more profoundly': he was, says his daughter 'mad about it.'), even he realized the right attitude for the reader was one of shock. He had, he said, after a perusal of her diary, felt thankful that 'we have not been constituted the judges of one another'.

For months after his pronouncement, seated in the conservatory among the ferns, or shading their face with a Japanese hand-screen in front of the drawing-room fire, the daughters of England sat and read, read with embarrassed glance and mounting colour, of this child who, at twelve, falling in love with a Scotch duke, enumerated the advantages his mistress had over herself by her luxurious surroundings; this child who

<sup>1</sup> *Le Visage Inconnu de Marie Bashkirtseff d'après ses Mémoires*, par Pierre Borel, p. 193.

blandly recommended the water-closet as the best place, if one wished to cry in secret, in which to do it. No wonder Mr. Gladstone was thankful he was not called upon to pass final judgment on Marie Bashkirtseff, no wonder he said that the 'lesson' taught by these pages 'was one to be learned in silence'.

It is not only at the end of the nineteenth century that a thirst for personal success has been condemned. From Montaigne and Milton downward, hard things have been said about ambition. 'Not for long,' wrote Montaigne, 'do virtue and ambition reside together.' What then would he have thought of a girl who from the age of three onwards lived only for success, for fame, for *la gloire*?

But there is another view of ambition which is curiously ignored. If, in its inception, it is egoistic, in its final effect it is beneficent. What would the world be without its famous? The human grass loves its flowers. Leaving on one side paramount genius, let us investigate a little further these renowned, these extraordinary so beloved of the ordinary. The fame of those born great is very apt, unless they happen to be reigning monarchs, to die with them: those who have greatness thrust upon them are remarkably few: there remain those who achieve greatness. And how do they achieve it? Generally through ambition and incessant effort. And mankind always draws round the ring to watch these prize-fighters whose protagonist is life itself. So much intenser the egoism so much better the show. Is there, then, such a thing as praiseworthy egoism? And whoever may wince at egoism being cancelled by such an adjective will at least agree that for those who are stung with the desire to succeed it is better that they should realize their ambition so as to outgrow it.

## 2

In South Russia, in that district known as Little Russia, there were, in the middle of the last century, two country houses destined to provide, the one the father, the other the mother of Marie Bashkirtseff.

The Babanine family lived in cheerful multiplicity in their big house at Tcherniakoff, wandering in and out of their seven drawing-rooms that were hung with ikons and pictures. There were Monsieur and Madame Babanine,<sup>1</sup> two daughters and seven sons. They belonged to what was then called the provincial nobility. At that time in Russia it was still fashionable both to have ancestors and to be proud of them, and Monsieur Babanine drew immense satisfaction from the tradition that his ancestors were Tartars 'of the first invasion'. Marie, the elder daughter, was the Babarine pearl of great price. Her eyes, large and brown, gazed out from between chestnut curls that swayed over cheeks delicately tinted as those of a pastel, and if her charming mouth was the merest shade too wide, it was a proof of kindness of heart that could always be relied on. It was fortunate she had an agreeable disposition, otherwise her character might have suffered from the idolization she received from the entire family. Sophie, the younger sister, was the idol of no one. A great gaunt creature all nose and bone, a raucous voice, and a cigar thrust between thick lips—such was the younger Babanine daughter. But her heart was a flame of kindness, and she too gladly paid homage to the family Venus.

A certain Monsieur Romanoff, who owned a large property, lost his heart to the youthful Marie and her swaying curls, and asked her to marry him. And now comes a curious and far from savory episode in the history of the Babanine family. Monsieur Romanoff was rich, and the Babanines were not: their manner of living gave the impression they were well off, but ultimately, with nine children to provide for, there would not be much to go round. It would be most satisfactory to have this extremely rich Monsieur Romanoff as a son-in-law; but he was not a young man, and in consequence Marie would not have him. If only he would transfer his affections to Marie's sister! But it was obvious he would not; it was doubtful if any man would ever centre his affections on Sophie Babanine. The situation to any other family would have appeared insoluble, but in this instance the Babanines

<sup>1</sup> As Marie Bashkirtseff's Diary was written in French, I have kept to the designations 'Monsieur' and 'Madame'.

proved themselves distressingly resourceful. Memories of scripture-readings came most conveniently to their aid. They hatched a plot. In whose head this plot had birth, how many of the family were involved in carrying it out, we do not know, but this is what happened.

Marie accepted Monsieur Romanoff. The marriage preparations went forward. On the morning of the wedding day the bridegroom was welcomed by the Babanines by being given wine to drink. He was given more wine—and more, and more. Monsieur Romanoff became drunk. Monsieur Romanoff became very drunk indeed, so drunk that when the moment came to be married he did not notice that at his side at the altar stood, not Marie, but Sophie.

What can one think of a family that would lend itself to this kind of deception; of a girl who would impose herself in this manner on a man who did not want her? These questions are only too easily answered. It would, one might be justified in thinking, be an occasion for Nemesis in full panoply to descend and administer an only too well merited punishment to Sophie Babanine. But for the moment Nemesis made no move. Against all moral principles the marriage ran its course none too badly. Sophie was like some gaunt, faithful hound that is ready to lavish its affection on anyone who can bear to receive it, and her husband not only put up with her but became attached to her. His health gave way, and he found in Sophie an admirable nurse. After all, when very ill, the qualities of heart of those near one are of more importance than the shape of their bones.

Monsieur Romanoff did not live many years, and in his will he left his entire property to his wife. The Romanoff relations started legal proceedings over the will; proceedings which were to go on interminably year after year, hanging like a sinister cloud over the Babanines.

Her younger sister disposed of, Marie, now twenty-one, married a big blond young man with light eyes, called Constantin Bashkirtseff. Constantin had not had the good fortune of being brought up in the sunshine of affection and good-humour that had surrounded Marie. He had been tyrannized over by his father, a ferocious Crimean general, and

no sooner had the son grown up and become his own master than the reaction which might have been foreseen took place. In the neighbouring town he not only investigated all the delights of dissipation but also became financially involved, and half ruined himself. Slightly sobered by these experiences he settled down to live on the family property at Gavronzi, and it was now, at twenty-five, that he fell in love with Marie Babanine.

Constantin was a fairly, but not altogether, agreeable young man. He positively could not resist running conversational pins into people for the pleasure of seeing them wince. He was egoistic and a trifle hypocritical. Like the Babanines he too had pride of birth, which pride would at moments get the upper hand of him. At these times when he remembered his ancestors he would try to appear a little grand, an effect he unfortunately could not quite bring off. What life had really cut him out to be was the *bon garçon* of popular imagination, and as long as he kept to this, his obvious rôle, he got on splendidly. At Gavronzi he was in his element; giving orders, aiming his gun at various animals, driving round to his country neighbours brimming over with just the kind of jokes his country neighbours liked.

Gavronzi was a charming property: there was the large house itself, and there were several smaller ones. The windows of the big house opened on to a panorama of trees, hills, and river. On one side was a courtyard in which stood nine cannons. And they did not only stand there. In moments of peculiar exaltation—or possibly when he wished to induce this mood of exaltation—Constantin would let them off, all nine of them. From these explosions he drew pleasure. What pleasure, exactly? A gift to himself of a sense of power? A kind of aural sadism? Who can say. Whatever it was, for the moment it enhanced life, made it better.

The noise the guns made was gorgeous—nine colossal, shattering bangs, slamming into the far-stretching quiet of the country, and then, after the ninth and final bang, complete silence . . . eerie . . . profound . . . Yes, Constantin might not be one of the socially great of St. Petersburg, not one of those who, on nights when the frozen Neva glittered beneath the

moon, went on the razzle-dazzle with the Grand Dukes and in regal companionship got drunk in café-chantants; no, these heady delights were not for country-squire Constantin, but all the same he had his guns. When he so wished, no man in Russia could make a more splendid noise.

To get to know Constantin's real character is difficult. If one wishes to look at Marie Babanine she instantly and obligingly stands before one, a pretty gentle creature, light-hearted and naïve, but if one approaches Constantin with one's biographical net, however cautiously one creeps up to entrap him, he seems to give one glance from his particularly light eyes, and then to walk swiftly away with that quick, cat-like tread peculiar to large, blond men who are slightly hypocritical.

Constantin would not have been an easy man for any woman to marry, and for Marie to attempt it meant certain failure. However, she did attempt it, and very soon life at Gavronzi was as full of discords and disagreeables as any intelligent person could have foreseen it would be. Marie had to adapt herself not only to her husband but to his sisters and their father, who all lived in the house. Good-natured, pliable creature that Marie was, the strain proved too much. And she too had her weaknesses. In spite of her good-humour and unplumbed depths of devotion she was restless and capricious. The happy-go-lucky Babanines did not trouble over-much about education, and little had come her way: her mind skipped here, skipped there, but never got far. She chattered incessantly, she dressed a little too showily. Though quick-witted enough, everyone soon discovered that behind the lovely façade of her face was a remarkably trivial mind. Now, at Gavronzi, instead of the indulgence she was accustomed to, she found her whims brought up short against her husband's egoism, her gentleness bruised by his sharp remarks. Two babies arrived, first a boy whom they called Paul, and then a year or two later, in 1860, a girl who was christened Marie. But neither these infants, nor the size of his wife's eyes, nor the perfect way these eyes matched her spaniel ringlets were sufficient to prevent Constantin's inclinations from at times turning elsewhere. It was not that he was not fond of Marie,

but he faithful he could not. The Babanines considered their daughter was not being properly treated, and Constantin's male complacency was disturbed by their criticisms. The situation, already sore, was made still more so by the intervention in their turn of Constantin's relations. War was declared. Constantin possessed four sisters; and with Marie's parents, her sister and seven brothers on the other side there was no lack of combatants. The Babanine family with their Tartar descent could not, must not, be downed; and, equally, the Bashkirtseffs with their long line of ancestors could not, must not, be downed. The details of these verbal encounters and skirmishes we do not know, but a day came when a carriage drove up to the door of Gavronzi, and Marie with her griefs and her trunks and her children and her children's nurses got into it and drove away back to Tcherniakoff and her parents, leaving Constantin at once victorious and vanquished.

Henceforward he had a double part to play: outwardly to appear the inconsolable husband while actually he found much consolation in other women, and fathered several illegitimate children. On the surface Constantin seems the more blameable for this ship-wrecked marriage. He may have been one of those men to whom monogamy is practically an impossibility, and who in consequence should not marry one of the Marie Babanines of this world. On the other hand, Marie herself, with her whims and caprices, so new to life, so new to men, may have been fundamentally responsible for his vagaries.

Constantin had a portrait painted of his wife, which he hung on the wall of his dining room. Possibly he found Marie Babanine more satisfactory as a picture than as a human being; there she hung, this pretty flower that he and no other man had plucked, lovely as ever to look at with her drooping curls, but no longer restless or tiresome or reproaching him for those infidelities he found so charming. Possibly he preferred her like this, and possibly he did not: I cannot pretend to act cicerone to Constantin's private thoughts. Certainly he professed great grief at losing her: but then Constantin always professed anything that made a good impression.

Meanwhile Marie stayed at Tcherniakoff with her parents. She did not intend to remain there indefinitely: later, so she

thought, she would travel. In her life which, barely begun, had already become unsatisfactory, she had however one great centre of interest. This was her little girl, Marie, on whom, far more than on her son, her maternal affections centred. There was for this a special reason. A clairvoyant Jew had told her: 'You have two children. Your son will be like everyone else, but your daughter will be a star.' Madame Bashkirtseff did not doubt it; her belief spread to others, and this small child became the pivot on which the whole Babanine household turned. In some way not exactly defined she would justify the Babanine family to the world, prove that it was not for nothing they were descended from the first Tartars.

It was a large family collected round the small Marie. There were not only her mother and her grand-parents but Aunt Sophie too, who after her husband's death returned to Tchernia-koff. Then there was a little girl cousin called Dina. The father of this child was George Babanine, one of Madame Bashkirtseff's brothers. He was both drunkard and gambler, and therefore Dina, three years older than Marie, had been taken to be brought up with her. Outside this inner family circle was a larger one consisting of other brothers of Madame Bashkirtseff: some of them had government employments, some were married and had children. Even this larger circle seems to have been ready to concur in Madame Bashkirtseff's opinion that her daughter was potentially a person of great importance. As for the child herself, a pale, chétif little creature, she agreed enthusiastically—what child would not?—and when only a few years old had already come to look on herself as a being who could do no wrong. Her mother ventured one day to give her a slight scolding. 'Nana,' said the infant turning to her nurse, 'Let us go away. Mama does not recognize Marie.' By the time she was three the idea of future greatness was so fixed in the child that, as she was playing about, any thought that crossed her mind, or any conversations she overheard her mother taking part in seemed, in some mysterious and wholly delightful way, to be connected with 'this greatness that was inevitably coming'. When she was five she would dress herself up in pieces of lace belonging to her mother, put flowers in her hair, and dance away in the drawing-room

## FOUNTAINS OF YOUTH

surrounded by her admiring family. While she pranced about, she imagined herself now one person, now another—now she was the famous dancer, Petipa: now she was the world's greatest singer: and then, her imagination taking fire, she ascended the throne of all the Russias, for so electrified were the masses by her dynamic personality that the Czar, feeling his throne totter, had been forced to ask her to share it. Unusual imaginings for a child of five! And yet, if one could know all the thoughts that go on behind those shut rosebud faces, perhaps not so unusual after all.

Tcherniakoff must have been a pleasant house to be in. Besides the general atmosphere of easy good humour there was a stir of life made by the comings and goings of all the people who lived there: the grandparents, the daughters—and also probably some of the sons—the three small children, Dina, Marie, and Paul; the children's governesses, and also the family doctor and friend Lucien Walitsky. It is not quite clear if Walitsky actually lived in the house, but he was very much part of it.

Marie had two governesses at a time, one Russian and one French, for such was the custom of the day for well brought up girls of good family. Her first Russian governess was a Madame Melnikoff, a woman of the Babanine's own world, now separated from her husband. As the result of reading innumerable novels of a romantic character she had decided to adopt the rôle of a governess, and at Tcherniakoff pursued her self-imposed avocation in the greatest comfort, becoming devoted to the odd little Marie. But one morning, following on some love affair, the attractive Madame Melnikoff suddenly disappeared. There was not the slightest reason why she should not have departed in a normal manner, but Madame Melnikoff liked to get the full flavour out of life. To be sudden, to be dramatic—such was her creed. In one phrase the Babanine's both explained and exonerated her behaviour: 'In Russia people are very romantic.' They seem to have been rather pleased than not: she had been true to type: given proof of a marked Russian characteristic. It was all very charming and amusing! They turned back to their usual occupations.

## COUNTRY FAMILIES OF LITTLE RUSSIA

Madame Melnikoff was followed by a Madame Brenne, a blue-eyed French woman of fifty, her hair arranged in a fashion long passed. Madame Brenne was consumptive and sad; her personality lacked emphasis. Marie, however, became devoted to her, and spent hours in close companionship with this consumptive. Germs and their unpleasant activities did not disturb the peace of mind of the Babanines.

As Russian colleague Madame Brenne had a girl of sixteen called Sophie Dolgikoff: this youthful Sophie being treated as child of the house even to the point of having a husband found for her.

The prospective husband was a young man who had been introduced to the Babanines by Walitsky, and who was now staying at Tcherniakoff. This protégé of the doctor was anxious to marry, but owing to a particularly ugly face had so far met with no success. Sixteen times he had seemed on the point of achievement, and sixteen times he had failed. However this affair with Sophie Dolgikoff really promised well. The girl-governess, no doubt enchanted at escaping from the prospect of being a teacher for the rest of her life, had accepted him, and everything was going delightfully. But this young man had been marked down by the Fates. Years later in her diary Marie Bashkirtseff described the disastrous episode.

'One evening,' she says, 'on going into her room I saw Mademoiselle Sophie crying like a lost soul, her nose in the cushions. Everyone came in.'

'"Whatever is the matter?"'

'At last, after much weeping and sobbing, the poor child ended by saying that she could never, no never! . . . And the tears!

'"But why?"'

'"Because . . . because I can't get used to his face!"'

The young man was in the drawing-room close by, and heard. Within an hour he had strapped his trunk and fled. His ultimate fate we do not know: for an instant, illumined by the light of Marie's diary, he stands before us in all his wretchedness, then he runs from the page, obscurity covers him.

Of the daily life at Tcherniakoff we are not told much. We do, however, hear of some *tableaux vivants* taking place one

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July, when Marie was seven, in which she, Dina, and Paul posed as gods and goddesses. So much trouble was expended on these *tableaux vivants* that they must certainly have been done for a party, and in imagination one can see the drawing-rooms filled by women in their light summer crinolines, for the crinoline was then in fashion and at its largest, and when these swaying bee-hives were all pressed together in the rooms the infant gods and goddesses must have had almost to push their way through a soft suffocation of muslin and flounces, frills and lace.

Madame Bashkirtseff would occasionally pay visits to the Crimea and St. Petersburg, her children at times, so it seems, accompanying her. In the Crimea the Imperial Family had a palace where they went for the summer, and one year when Madame Bashkirtseff was there she received a great deal of attention from the Russian Emperor. Alexander II was one of the huge limbed Romanoff men, with an innate grace that made every movement proclaim 'I am the Czar:' remarkable eyes that paused and pondered, splendid masculine contour of face ornamented by the then fashionable swirl of moustache and whisker. He talked much to Madame Bashkirtseff, he paid her compliments, he looked at her a great deal. After her failure to hold the affections of a Constantin, to be the admired of the Czar of all the Russias! For the moment life was gay as the sky that dazzled through the sculptured lace of the Crimean minarets. But Madame Bashkirtseff's head was not of the quality to receive attention from an Emperor without becoming turned, and she began to consider herself of more value than she actually was. Many entrances as there were to the Czar's heart for a pretty woman there were, almost of necessity, as many exits. Whether he realized that Madame Bashkirtseff's morals would be proof against any imperial wishes, or whether he merely grew bored at the vapid mind behind its lovely mask, the day came when she found him giving more attention to another woman than to her. As a rule socially timid, Madame Bashkirtseff would have little spurts of trying to impress: little spurts that generally went too far, and this, coupled with her lack of knowledge of the world, now made her commit an incredible clumsiness. One

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day when the Czar had gone to her rival's house she pointedly placed herself where he could not help passing her on his way out.

~~"That is not done, Madame!"~~ remarked Alexander as he walked by her.

On the instant she understood: in the Czar's eyes she simply did not know how to behave! But Alexander had realized the cloak of shame in which his words had enveloped her, and with that adroit kindness of which he was past master he sent her a ring. A ring, it appears, more of dismissal than anything else, for there are presents that divide as well as presents that join; but it was to remain for Madame Bashkirtseff a tangible and treasured proof of the most exciting friendship of her life.

### 3

While Marie was still a child her grandmother, old Madame Babanine, grew extremely ill, and her little grand-daughter would play to her as she lay in bed. A long passage separated the grandmother's room from the room in which was the piano, a passage of such immense length that it was like a symbol of the stretch of years between the old woman who lay dying at one end of it and the child who sat gaily thumping the piano at the other, serenading in these leaping notes her own radiant future.

For gradually from the confused blur of childhood she had developed a general conception of existence. Life lay spread before her, a glistening panorama of all possible delights. Only occasionally did the suggestion of a cloud darken this gay landscape. There was, for instance, a disturbing thing called smallpox: she had noticed that once people had had it they were no longer nice to look at. It was, of course, unthinkable that such a thing should happen to her, Marie, and in this well-arranged cosmos there was a safeguard against that or any other unpleasant contingency. Somewhere inside the sky, right within that great sea of blue, was a Being called God, a kind of super-Babanine who had power over smallpox and everything else, and whose ardent wish, so she under-

stood, was for the continuous worldly advancement of Marie Bashkirtseff. Why of Marie Bashkirtseff in particular? When one's age is represented by a single figure one does not ask questions like: why in particular? One accepts. It was so, and it was extremely satisfactory that it should be so. All one had to do was to explain to this Being what one wanted and it was done. A few instructions night and morning sufficed. She composed a short and practical prayer: 'Oh God, see to it that I never catch smallpox, that I am pretty and have a beautiful voice, am happy at home and that Mama lives a long time.' Then she got into bed—softly, easily, to glide to unconsciousness with the happy certainty that when she woke, there outside the window-sill would be the present of a quite new day, a day as good, as whole, as perfect as all the days that had gone before it: days that one by one, light as air-balls, had flown so blithely over her shoulder to disappear and form her short and happy past.

When, finally, her mother died, Madame Bashkirtseff persuaded her father to leave Tcherniakoff for good. 'In 1870, in the month of May,' writes Marie, 'we left for abroad. Mama's long-cherished dream was fulfilled.' The quarrels with the Bashkirtseffs; the lawsuit with the Romanoffs that trailed on interminably, and the scandals connected with Dina's disreputable father may certainly have made Russia a less pleasant place for the Babanines than it used to be, and this no doubt reinforced Madame Bashkirtseff's conviction that if only she moved about enough, went on looking long enough, she would find some country or some town that would give her the sense of satisfaction she lacked. Old Monsieur Babanine seems to have left his home with reluctance: especially did he feel parting with his library, but on the whole his living daughters and grand-children had a stronger pull on his affections than his books. Or, possibly, the chief reason for his accompanying them may have been that he needed a warmer country for his health. This departure from Tcherniakoff, this conclusive loosening from their accustomed moorings meant for the family a tremendous effort. But it was accomplished at last, and the whole family troupe set off on their peregrinations. They were a party of seven: the grandfather, Madame

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Bashkirtseff, Aunt Sophie, the three children, and, finally, Walitsky, for at the last moment it was realized that Monsieur Babanine, now becoming very frail, ought to have a doctor to travel with him; so he too had been persuaded to say good-bye to his friends and join the Babanines in their hotel and foreign spa adventures.

For two years they wandered. From Tcherniakoff they went to Vienna, then in June to Baden-Baden. Their progress was a progress of luxury and amusement. Along the sun-bathed streets of Baden, by the shops and the kiosks, strolled the rich and the fashionable mutually appraising and admiring each other; bands were playing; music was afloat in the sunshined air, percolating through sunlit leaves. There were theatres, race-meetings, and pigeon-shootings. The shops were full of enchanting things to buy, the theatres of delightful plays to see. Old grandfather Babanine may not have cared particularly for buying things in shops or for going to theatres, but he did care for excellent food, and it must have been pleasant for him and for all of them to be able to draw so continuously, to live so opulently, on Aunt Sophie's cheque book. Without her money they could not have travelled in this care-free manner, without it they probably could not have travelled at all. 'The wicked flourish like a bay tree.' One hesitates, one shrinks from applying these words to Aunt Sophie—Aunt Sophie the generous, the devoted, the self-sacrificing, and yet....! Hers is certainly a marked example of the primrose path of successful sinners.

From Baden-Baden they drifted to Geneva, and from Geneva to Nice.

And at Nice, that Nice of the 'seventies so essentially different from the Nice of to-day the vagabond family came to rest. The Babanine Ark had found its Ararat.

## Chapter Two

### APOLLO DRIVES BY

When at the end of the summer of 1872 the Babanines settled themselves at Nice, there, overlooking the sea, along the *Promenade des Anglais* where now stands the row of hotels, then stood private houses each with its own garden. No screech of motor horn militated against the soft boom of the summer sea that came up from the beach below. Here and there on the benches along the Promenade, figures lolled in the heat in peaceful stupor; and up and down in the sunshine drove glistening carriages drawn by high-stepping horses, while within the carriages, be-flounced and be-furbelowed, their tiny pagoda parasols pricking into the sunlight, sat the women who formed Nice society. For Nice at that time had its own society and its own salons: wealth alone could not force entrance into these salons, for the owners prided themselves on the slow-moving hinges of their excluding doors.

On the *Promenade des Anglais* the Russian family found a furnished house to let that was called *Acqua-Viva*, and into this house they now settled themselves.

From Murray's guide-book to the Nice of that day rises an atmosphere which now seems strangely alien. Readers are counselled to lose no time in making the acquaintance of the grocer, Berlandina, as 'he is an obliging man and will give information as to lodgings, servants, etc.' English women are informed that 'Nice is celebrated for its straw hats for ladies, perhaps the best protection against the sun'. They are also urged to buy '*Linen Umbrellas*, called *sun-shades* . . . Those in grey silk, lined with green are the best, but', Mr. Murray gently warns them, 'more expensive.' Among the delights of Nice that he tabulates for them are 'Basket-carriages, with pair of ponies, driving yourself, conducteur behind, 5 to 10 fr. an hour during season.' He warns Englishmen that 'The English Club, in the *Place Masséna*, has become a gambling

club; high play; ought to be avoided (see *Times*, 6th April, 1870),' but counteracts any depression caused by this news by encouraging information regarding '*Booksellers, Circulating Libraries*. The establishment still carried on in Viscounti's name, in the *Cours*, is the largest of the kind in Nice, and a general place of rendez-vous for foreigners; the collection of newspapers, reviews, and other periodicals is extensive and well-chosen'. There were an opera-house, a theatre, and the '*Cercle de la Méditerranée*, a new and magnificent establishment on the *Promenade des Anglais* containing concert, ball, and reading rooms', while for those who could not afford such glitter there was always the 'neat Gothic edifice' in which to pursue their devotions, or, if they preferred, they could have a Turkish bath in the *Place Grimaldi*.

Here, then, we see the Babanine family settled in their new home. Their front door always stood wide open, and sometimes out from the comparative dimness of the hall within into the glare of the sun-drenched parade would come grandfather Babanine with his fine old-man face and white beard, supported by his man-servant, Triphon. Or perhaps it would be Walitsky hurrying out to see some patient, for besides looking after Monsieur Babanine he continued to a certain extent to practise at Nice. Of this man, 'that angel Walitsky,' as Marie calls him, we would like to know more than we do. A beneficent spirit, he occasionally steps forward in Marie's diary to advise, to help, or to console, and then disappears again too far into the background for us to see him clearly. His dependent position in the household a little blots him out, but one gets the impression not only of a man of charm but of exceptional beauty of character. But to return to the Babanine's house . . . now through the doorway might come Aunt Sophie, gaunt but imposing, off to the gaming-tables, for to gamble was Aunt Sophie's recreation and pleasure. Perhaps Madame Bashkirtseff would be with her, still a lovely woman, but unsuccessful as ever with her clothes, alternating between the too ornate and the slovenly. And often, with a scrimmage of yapping, barking dogs, out through the doorway, with an attendant governess, would come the children, Dina, Marie, and Paul. Dina had a plain face, a mass of fair hair,

and immense good-nature. Paul was a stolid, good-looking boy, now becoming a little restive under feminine rule. As for Marie, her hair was like her cousin's, and, now nearly twelve, she was developing into that plump compactness which was then admired: she had a Greuze child face with arresting eyes, a small neat nose, and a little air of allurement. She was essentially a child of the world, and hot on the trail of fame. Sometimes she and her governess went out alone. The child loved to rush along hatless, her hair growing warm in the down-beating sun. She hoped intensely that the people she passed admired her. But did they? Was she worth admiring? These were the questions that flickered behind those glancing blue-grey eyes. 'People looked at me a great deal,' she writes one day on coming back from a walk, 'I should like to know why they look at me, if it is because I am odd or pretty, I would give a lot to know.' But another day a little warm current of self-confidence would creep through her. 'I am not ugly, even pretty, rather pretty. I am extremely well made, like a statue . . . I have a very good coquettish manner, I know how to behave with men.'

When she and her family had been at Baden-Baden, the Duke of Hamilton had been there as well. This big young man with his bronze hair and Apollo features was almost startlingly good-looking, and his slightly arrogant air mutely advertised his splendour. Marie often saw him walking about the town, and heard her mother's friends talk of him, but to her the fact of his existence meant nothing. Then one day at the Baden races a friend happened to say that he had just been talking to the Duke, and the child felt a curious thing happen inside her, a thing she had never felt before. 'My heart,' she writes in her diary, 'gave a jerk that I did not understand.' However, it did not make her feel any more interested in the Duke, she merely carefully watched him as she watched all her audience to see how they reacted to her appearance. 'When I passed by the English shops, he was there and he looked at me as if he were saying mockingly: "What a queer little girl, whatever does she imagine herself to be?" He was right, too,' she goes on, 'I was very funny with my little silk dresses, I was ridiculous.' But what she could not understand was why, though she

felt no interest in this man, yet whenever after this she happened to meet him something inside her always gave that odd jerk, 'such a strong blow in my chest that it hurt me, I do not know if anyone else has felt that.'

All this had been at Baden-Baden. Now, when the Bashkirtseffs settled down at Nice, Hamilton—as her family called him—again appeared. He possessed everything that a superb young man of the 'seventies should possess: a carriage in which he whirled along behind four horses: a yacht: a mistress, a beautiful Italian whom when he was at Nice he kept in the *Villa de Gioia*. Marie knew all about this Italian woman.

One day Marie and her mother were driving to the races, and passed the *Villa de Gioia*. There was a small terrace outside it, and on this terrace sat the Duke and his mistress. In his hand he held a little cake. As the Bashkirtseff mother and daughter drove by they looked at him and he looked at them.

'You see,' said Madame Bashkirtseff, 'if Hamilton eats little cakes, that is quite natural, he is *chez lui*.'

So the Duke sat in the mild air eating his little cakes, and the child who was to become so much more famous than he, eyed him as they drove by. 'Still,' she writes, 'I did not understand this kind of disturbance inside me on seeing him.'

And then suddenly one day, sweet as hyacinths in spring, a new feeling invaded her. She realized that, unknown to herself, her emotions had all this time been entwining their every tendril round that familiar figure, that young bronzed head, that young splendid body. She realized that this must be what it was to be in love. And in secret, tremulous, eager, aflame with joy, her child-heart ran to lay all its treasure at his feet.

Marriage with him would come in time, naturally—but not precisely yet. In her diary she would reason it out. 'If *le bon Dieu* will preserve, strengthen and enlarge my voice, in that way I shall have the triumph I thirst for . . . celebrated, known, admired; and it is in this way I shall be able to win him I love. Remaining as I am I have little hope he will love me, he ignores my existence. But when he sees me surrounded with glory and triumph! . . .' Ah! then . . .! So she would pursue her argument of love. But to grow up, to become a great singer,

to marry him—all that would take time. For the moment all she could do was to worship. And the delight of it! A shimmer of joy lay over everything. ‘Oh! how well I understand the expression, drunk with happiness, for that is what I was.’ She hardly aspired as yet to know him, to see him was enough. ‘To see him . . . to see him again . . . that was all I asked!’ She would wait about on the terrace of their house hoping, praying for a sight of him, and then, sometimes, she would be rewarded. Along the promenade she would catch sight of his carriage . . . it was coming nearer . . . closer . . . quite close . . . it was upon her . . . the gay clattering of sixteen quick-trotting hoofs: pin-points of sunlight pricking the harness: sunlight flashing on varnished panels: and within the carriage, the air playing about his sculptured features, Hamilton himself! No longer an image within her mind, but there before her on the familiar road, close, actual, solid—this very instant passing before her riveted eyes! Yes, alas, passing! . . . already she has turned and is looking now in the opposite direction at this glistening splendour, as it recedes further, further from her straining love . . . becoming smaller as it goes . . . dwindling . . . shrinking . . . now merely an indistinct something in the distant landscape of the promenade . . . now merging wholly into that landscape . . . invisible . . . gone . . . ! And ‘all giddy’ back to the house she would go. ‘I would throw myself into Colignon’s arms . . . hide my face on her chest.’

Could one find any child now who would expose her feelings in this way? Probably not: certainly no English child. But Marie was not of our day, nor was she English. Neither to her nor to Mademoiselle Colignon did there seem anything peculiar in her behaviour: the sun shines, the sea rocks, the trees put forth their leaves, and women tremble with love. Such is the order of the universe: why shrink from saying so? Why be ashamed? Marie was not, neither was her governess. She received the impact of the excited child against her chest, and then gently making her stand up, led her to her lessons.

The Duke would sometimes be at Nice and sometimes not, and it is during one of his absences, in the January of next year, 1873, that we have the first page of Marie’s diary.

*'January (at the age of 12)—Nice, promenade des Anglais Villa Acqua-Viva.*

'Aunt Sophie is at the piano, playing airs of Little Russians, and it has brought our country to my mind, I feel I am back there, and what memories can I have of it if not of poor grandmama? Tears come to my eyes . . . in a moment they will run down: they do already . . . Poor Grandmama! . . . how you loved me, and I you! but I was a little too small to love you as you deserved to be! . . . The memory of grandmama is a respectful, sacred, beloved memory, but it is not living! O God give me happiness in life and I shall be grateful. But what am I saying? It seems to me I am in this world for happiness: make me happy, O God!

'Aunt Sophie keeps on playing; the sound reaches me at intervals . . . O God give me the Duke of Hamilton! I will love him and make him happy; I shall be happy too. I will do good to the poor. It is a sin to think one can buy God's favours with good works, but I do not know how to express myself.

'I love the Duke of Hamilton and I cannot tell him that I love him, and even if I did he would pay no attention. When he was here I had an object for going out, for dressing up, but now! . . . It hurts me not to see him on the promenade.'

There were two Russian girls, the Sopogenikoffs, who were sometimes at Nice, with whom Marie would play, and when they were all together their days became dizzy with joy: really at times the three laughing, gasping creatures would nearly evaporate with sheer delight at being alive. Of these times we would like to know more than we do. For too few moments are we enveloped in these cloud-bursts of laughter—shaking, suffocating laughter over some exquisite joke that would go on for days. . . . There was that one, for instance, about the General: such a gorgeous joke that it had its own jingle:

*Ah! c'est bien étonnant!  
Ah! c'est bien surprenant!  
Qui! me dira comment  
Fि! nit cet incident,  
Ah! c'est bien étonnant!*

The children sang it for days on end as they pranced about the house and garden: it was a banner of gaiety that their voices tossed to and fro. . . . Yes, to be with the Sopogenikoffs was to be always finding nuggets of gold in the ordinary earth of life. The joy of the Sopogenikoffs was one joy: and the joy of being in love with Hamilton was another and a different joy.

In the middle of January, on one of those misting days when it is hard to tell whether it is raining or not, Marie was out walking with Mademoiselle Colignon, and suddenly a half-closed landau swept by them. But, though half-closed, Marie had just for an instant caught sight of the Duke inside it gazing straight in front of him. The direction in which he was going meant that he was on his way to his mistress. ‘O caro Hamilton!’ ‘Seeing me go red Mademoiselle said almost severely, “Don’t do that, Marie, it so unnerves me.”’ Yes, if only she could stop it! This rush of colour gave away her secret to every one. But God no doubt could control her circulation if she could not. And she added a clause to that effect in her prayers.

At the end of the month, away across the water she saw a yacht ‘with a big English flag’, and knew it to be the Duke’s. The yacht was not he, but it belonged to him, and her eyes drank it in: by staring very hard she could just see some ladies on the bridge ‘and the red parasol of the W. . . .’ Then, encased in the blue of sky and sea, the yacht glided on to Monte Carlo; and Marie returned to her diary to write it all down.

In February she was with the others at, it appears, a race-meeting, when ‘All at once I heard someone whistling behind me. It was the Duke. He was whistling like he was the first evening when I saw him at Baden. He was whistling (even to write it makes my heart beat).

‘I turned round, he saw me, then I went red and my heart began to beat like a hammer. He wore a coat made rather in the style of my cloak, a blue shirt, a maroon-coloured hat. For a moment he stayed close by me, never had I imagined such great happiness! . . . What I want now is that he should know that I love him.’ Yes, her feelings were now so brimming over that somehow she positively must make him realize what

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he meant to her. And four days later her opportunity came. She was walking in the public gardens with, probably, a grown-up friend—someone called Helen—when, her friend not being with her at the moment, suddenly, without warning, she met the Duke. Now, in this garden with no onlooker, close to each other, face to face, now was her opportunity. . . . ‘He looked at me and I looked at him,’ and as she gazed up at him, she mutely tried to make what she felt write itself across her face: ‘Now that no one sees me I am speaking to you, I want to make you understand by the way I look at you all I feel for you. He looked at me again,’ she writes, ‘with great curiosity, and went slowly on.’ One is not surprised that the Duke’s thoughts, whatever they were as he strolled along, were momentarily arrested by that small round face upturned to his, those earnest child eyes a-swim with their unspoken message.

As Marie and her friend Helen were leaving the garden they again saw the Duke. ‘Look,’ exclaimed Helen, ‘there’s the Duke of Hamilton. He looks like a butcher!'

But Marie was not to be deceived. ‘Whatever she may say, I’m pretty certain she too finds him attractive!’ ‘I know myself,’ continues this child of twelve, ‘that that is how one speaks of men who please one.’

These few days had been days of exaltation, but there were others when the pendulum of joy swung backwards. Times when, momentarily, a little shudder of doubt invaded her. A little incident, for example, one day when the sea was blotted by a thick fog, and in the murky air objects glistened wetly. In spite of fog and damp Marie was at her usual observation post leaning on her elbows on the terrace balustrade, when the Duke came driving by. She saw him within his carriage bend forward to light a cigar. Marie realized he had not seen her, and this tiny fact coupled with the glooming light left a depression. ‘A man of thirty,’ she wrote afterwards in her diary, ‘a man who lives only for racing, horses, shooting, hunting, and who adores good wine and bad women, goes to see his mistress, lights his cigar with a calm and contented air, and I, fool that I am, look at him and . . .’ he does not even see her.

'Sad to say,' she writes, 'I am not, and never shall be his wife.' But when such thoughts came to her she would turn and scold her own pessimism. 'What? I dare despair like this! Is there not God who can do everything . . . ? I can be in Peru and the Duke in Africa, and if he wishes it he will reunite us. . . .' Yes all was well—really, it was merely a matter of waiting.

Though Marie with her early-acquired worldly knowledge knew just about the place a man's bought mistress holds in his affections, the thought of this Italian woman sharing the Duke's life was an annoyance. 'Ah,' she writes, 'how mistaken I was to think, never, out of jealousy, having looked at her, that G. . . was ugly. I saw her just now, abominable woman: she is beautiful, more beautiful than I am.' And another day when walking she again saw the Italian drive by: 'she is beautiful, not so much she herself as her *coiffure*; her setting is perfect. . . . Everything is distinguished, rich, magnificent; really one would take her for some great lady. It is natural that all this should contribute to her beauty—her house with its drawing-rooms, its little corners with a soft light falling across draperies or green leaves; she herself, her hair, her clothes as *soignée* as it's possible to be, seated in a magnificent drawing-room where everything is done and arranged to show her off to perfection. It is quite natural that she should please and that he should love her.' 'If I had her setting,' she adds, 'I should do still better.'

Yes, this Italian woman was an irritation, but a passing one. Except for her occasional moments of trepidation, life for Marie at this time was fragrant with happiness.

One day, seeing a charcoal burner, Marie asked Mademoiselle Colignon if she did not think him very like the Duke of Hamilton. 'How absurd,' said her governess with a smile. 'It gave me,' writes Marie, 'immense pleasure to pronounce his name. But I see that when one speaks to no one of him one loves, this love is stronger, while if one constantly talks of it (which is not my case) the love becomes weaker; it is like a bottle of spirit . . . if it is stoppered the smell is strong, while if it is open it evaporates.'

At Nice was a family called Howard, friends of the Bashkirtseffs and Marie would sometimes play with the children.

She writes of one Sunday that she and Dina spent with them, and of how in the evening they all wandered into the big drawing-room already half in darkness. The Howard children knew the little Russian girl sang, and were determined that to-day they would hear her: 'they went down on their knees . . .' writes Marie. 'We laughed so much.' So she gave them a French song, *Le Soleil s'est levé*. Up into the air leapt her young voice—*Le Soleil s'est levé . . . le soleil s'est levé . . .* and as the notes rang out in the darkening room, all the enchanting things life's cornucopia had already showered on her, and all the still more enchanting that she felt certain were yet to come must have pulsated in her voice, such an emotional stir did it make in the English children grouped round her; and when she had finished, in a soft flurry of excitement over they knew not exactly what, they flung themselves upon her.

Marie went home, her head swimming. 'Really I am quite enraptured with these children's admiration. Then what would it be if I were admired by others?' It was at moments such as this that, like some heavenly perfume, there stole towards her out of the future the certainty of coming fame. Everything seemed possible. Everything shone fair. 'Your daughter will be a star'—it had been said. In her flushed imagination she saw herself the world's singer; and then, like homing bees, her thoughts flew in the inevitable direction. 'Monseigneur le duc de Hamilton will come like the others to throw himself at my feet, but he will not have the same reception as the others, Dear, you will be dazzled with my splendour and you will love me'—so her englamoured pen ran on . . . 'God has shown me the means by which I can gain him whom I love . . . Thank you, O my God, thank you!'

## 2

When the Duke was not at Nice, life for Marie was like a clock that had run down. But still she could at least think of him, and in her mind he perpetually lived, moved, and had his being. Eager to bless him but not knowing where he was, she would in her schoolroom make the sign of the cross in the air, first in one direction and then in another: the flowered

wall-paper was scattered with blessings. Like God and her family, the Duke had become a fixture in her life, and in her prayers he had his own special clause.

Meanwhile, she worked at her lessons in a kind of determined frenzy: by becoming highly educated she hoped to raise her value in the Duke's eyes, and also she had an instinctive desire to perfect herself and acquire as much knowledge as she possibly could. 'At twenty I want to know everything!' She made out for herself a plan of study: seven—and later, nine—hours of work a day: English, Italian, French, music, drawing. This was followed up by Latin (of which her tutor said she learnt as much in five months as most children did in three years) and then she flung herself at Greek and chemistry. She not only played the piano but other instruments too: she rode, she swam, she skated, and above all she for ever tried to perfect her literary style in her diary. 'At present my style is nothing remarkable,' she writes, 'but several months back it was simply abominable.'

Unfortunately for Marie, Mademoiselle Colignon was in bad health, and in consequence would arrive in the morning, not at the time arranged, but in the vaguest manner . . . half an hour late . . . an hour . . . any time. 'I've been waiting an hour and a half for my lesson from Mademoiselle Colignon, and it's like this every day . . . inside I am burned up with rage and indignation! Mademoiselle Colignon misses my lessons, she makes me waste my time.

'I am thirteen; if I waste my time, what will become of me? My blood boils, I am quite pale, and at moments the blood goes to my head, my cheeks burn, my heart beats, I can't stay in one place . . . all this ruins my health, spoils my character, makes me irritable . . . in stealing from me my time for study she steals my whole life. . . . How it soothes me to write!' she ends up, 'I am calmer.' To this discord between pupil and governess there was a harsh finale which, mere schoolroom scuffle that it was, underlines for us Marie's character.

One day while the two sat at lessons Marie demanded of her governess some explanation in arithmetic. Mademoiselle Colignon answered that she ought to understand it by her-

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self. Marie observed that what she did not know ought to be explained to her.

‘There is no *ought* here!’ exclaimed the Colignon beginning to warm up.

‘There is an *ought* everywhere,’ retorted the pupil.

‘Wait a minute, I am going to come to an understanding about this first before going on to anything else.’

Maturity, flustered and uncertain, sat facing youth. Youth, self-assured and relentless, sat facing maturity.

‘You are thirteen,’ went on Mademoiselle Colignon, ‘how do you dare . . .?’

‘Exactly, Mademoiselle, as you say, I am thirteen, I do not choose to be spoken to in that way; don’t shout, I implore you.’

The Colignon, says Marie, ‘went off like a bomb.’ ‘This,’ she said, ‘is the last time I shall give you a lesson!'

‘Oh! so much the better!’ And as her governess left the room Marie gave the most audible sigh of relief possible. Then she too rushed out, and they ran down the corridor side by side: the governess fulminating, the child silent. The one went to complain to Madame Bashkirtseff, the other to her own room, presumably to set down this schoolroom epic in her diary. ‘She steals my time, there are four months of my life lost. . . . It is easy to say she is ill; but why injure me? She spoils my future happiness in making me lose my time in this way. Every time that I ask her for an explanation she replies in a rude voice; ‘I don’t choose to be spoken to like that!’

Two days later four lines of Marie’s diary are given to the now completely vanquished Colignon.

‘Mlle. Colignon goes to-morrow. All the same it is a trifle sad; one feels pain even when parting from a dog one has lived with. In spite of our relations, good or bad, I have a worm in my heart!’

In the garden of the Bashkirtseff’s house was a small moss-carpeted place so closely over-woven by branches that the sky was quite shut out. Within this screen of leaves the light was dimmed, and within this green dimness a fountain played. Here Marie loved to come and sit. The white threads of water rose in the air, then curved and fell into the low continuous

bubble and gurgle within the basin beneath. 'So fresh, so soft, so green, so lovely,' writes Marie one day in May of this leafy place, 'it would be impossible for me to give any idea of it, I couldn't do it. If the villa and garden have not changed I shall bring him here to show him the place where I've thought so much about him. Yesterday evening I prayed God, I implored him, and when I came to the momeat when I ask to get to know him, to grant it me, I cried on my knees. Three times already he has heard me and granted my prayer! the first time I asked for a croquet set, and my aunt brought it me from Geneva; the second time I asked his help to learn English....'

In her sentences there is some confusion between the Almighty and the Duke, but in her own mind there was none: one was the desired, the other was to grant her the desired.

As the heat at Nice grew greater, and the people fewer, the monotony of Marie's daily life weighed down her spirits. Oh! that far-stretching sun-glazed promenade with hardly a figure upon it! That perpetual ceaseless chatteration of her mother and aunt over health, servants, dogs: the morning, the afternoon, the evening: and then again lessons, walks . . . sun-drenched promenade . . . the morning, the afternoon . . . 'The summers at Nice kill me, there is not a soul there . . . One only lives once. To spend a summer at Nice is to lose half one's life. . . . Oh, if Mama and the others knew what it costs me to stay here, they would not keep me in this *horrible* desert! The world—that is my life; it calls me, waits for me I want to run to it. . . . Not the world of Nice, but of St. Petersburg, London, Paris.' There is no doubt that people are not only seemingly, but actually, alive in varying degrees of intensity. Marie, mind and body, was a-kick with vitality. She reacted swiftly to every experience, responded to the subtlest impressions; a finely-tuned human instrument avid to play its part in the orchestra of life.

Now, with her young exuberance aching for objects and interests in which to expend itself, she would at moments turn to Paul and try to brisk up that solid boy's seemingly dull perceptions. She submitted him to a dual and slightly contradictory course of instruction, at once urging him to a more subtle appreciation

## APOLLO DRIVES BY

of the seduction of women ('So far Paul has got no taste, he doesn't understand women's beauty'), and yet impressing on him the loftiest morality.

Paul and Dina were very different to Marie: they had no wish to spin webs in which to entrap all the super-gifts of life. Like the Almighty they looked on creation and found it good. They were content merely to be. How much Marie's life was intermingled with theirs we do not know. But we do know that, however much outwardly her occupations may have been the same as theirs, it was inwardly, within her own mind, that she really lived. In this inner life we know too who was her daily and hourly companion. All the small complications of her life she would lay before this inner adjudicator, and at that tribunal of love everything that was annoying vanished. And then, too, would come the comforting thought: 'when I'm grown up I shall have no more unhappiness: when he is with me I shall always be cheerful.' With close-shut door, in her school-room in the evening she would get out the exercise books that held her diary of a few months back, and then sit reading and re-reading about the times when the Duke had been at Nice. And she had something even better than her diary. There had somehow come her way a little photograph of one of the pigeon-shootings, in which she was certain one of the figures was the Duke. As a matter of fact only half this figure showed—but the amount of happiness she drew from that half-inch or so of shiny photograph! 'Every evening I look at the half-portrait of the Duke, the little photograph of the pigeon-shooting in my blotting book; I'm certain it's him. How good God is! . . . Without my doing anything about it, nor thinking of getting it, he has given it me! . . .' At these moments, as her soft pondering face hung over the tiny figure in the photographic print, time, unnoticed, slipped by her.

And, too, there were days during these weeks a-swim in heat when her strivings and yearnings were quiescent, days when for her too, as for Paul and Dina, it was good merely to be alive. 'One gets up with the day and one sees the sea appear down there on the left, behind the mountains that stand out clearly against the sky of silvered blue, so vaporous and soft that one is suffocated with joy. Towards midday . . . it is

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hot . . . everything seems asleep. There is not a soul on the Promenade except two or three of the Nice people drowsing on the benches. . . . In the evening, again the sky, the sea, the mountains. But in the evening it is all black or deep blue. And when the moon shines, this great road in the sea that seems like a diamond-scaled fish, and when I am at my window with . . . two candles, peaceful, alone, I ask for nothing, and prostrate myself before God. Oh! no, what I want to say will not be understood . . . I am in despair ~~every~~ time I want to explain what I feel!!'

She may well have despaired, may well have duplicated her exclamation marks rather than attempt to find words to describe these premonitory whisperings of an experience which, through the centuries, has made the mystics stammer. For this was not the Super-Babanine to whom she was accustomed to pray, not the useful Almighty who would procure her a croquet set or prevent her blushing. No: this being with whom in the quiet of the Mediterranean night she kept tryst was quite other, a being whose presence alone left nothing further to ask.

### 3

One day this summer Marie heard that her family had decided to leave their present house and go to another close by. This new house was *55 bis* of the *Promenade des Anglais* and looked both onto that and the *Rue de France*. Actually, Aunt Sophie had bought it as a present to her adored niece. But Marie would much have preferred not to have been given it. The house they were in was for her saturated with the unseen presence of the Duke. The terrace from which she had seen him go by, the schoolroom where all these months he had kept her silent but enchanting company—how could she bear to part with them? 'When I think I shall never see my dear schoolroom again! Here where I have thought of him so much! This table I'm leaning on and at which I have each day written all that is most sweet and sacred . . . ! These walls I would look at wanting to pierce through them and see far, far away! I saw him in each flower of the wall-paper! How

many scenes I have imagined in this study in which he played the chief rôle. It seems to me there's not a single thing in the world I haven't thought of in this little room, beginning at the simplest up to the most fantastic.'

However, the move took place, and in the new house Marie found herself in possession of a whole suite of rooms for herself. Their decoration was in keeping with her love of show and magnificence; whether by her own choice or by Aunt Sophie's we do not know. The first of these rooms, which was a small one, was hung with red satin, doors and windows also red. Then came her bedroom: the walls of padded sky-blue satin, with which mingled tulle and white lace. From the ceiling hung a Sèvres chandelier, and later the ceiling too was covered with blue satin, raying out from the centre. 'The whole effect was,' said Marie with satisfaction, 'like the inside of a glove-box.' She was too young to realize the second-rate tinge it gave to a girl of her age to have such theatrical surroundings: she did not know, and Madame Bashkirtseff and Aunt Sophie did not know: or else they knew and did not care. Marie's lace-curtained bed was shaped like a shell and stood on carved lions' feet. Beyond the bedroom came a large room, a kind of dressing and sitting-room combined, of which the wood-work was lacquered in rose and white, and the furniture covered with leaf-strewn cretonne. After that came a regular dressing-room with a bath, and after that a room lined with wardrobes, this room leading back to the first red satin one. These rooms a-shimmer with light from sky and sea opened on to a balcony. We do not hear of any similar suite for Dina: possibly she had one too, more probably she did not. Not only was there the big house but also a smaller one, a sort of pavilion that stood in the garden among the palms, the eucalyptus trees, the Barbary fig-trees, the roses, and the magnolias. In their midst a fountain gurgled.

In this new home the Bashkirtseffs resettled themselves in the greatest muddle and confusion. In some of the rooms they put furniture, and in others they did not trouble to put any at all. Untidiness was rampant. Marie, who had an instinctive love of order, hated it. 'The disorder in the house makes me wretched: the domestic details, the rooms without furniture,

this air of devastation, of misery breaks my heart! My God, take pity on me and help me to do something about it. I have no one to help me. As for my aunt, it is all one to her. The house may fall down, the garden dry up . . . The truth is, both Aunt Sophie and Madame Bashkirtseff hated to exert themselves. Order meant effort: disorder meant not being bothered: they sank back and accepted disorder.

But the autumn was to bring Marie an experience far worse than that of having to live in a slovenly house.

It was a Monday morning in October, and schoolroom lessons were in progress. Marie was hunting for her place in a book when her English governess, 'the little Heder', suddenly remarked: 'Do you know that the Duke is going to marry the Duchess M. . . . ?'

'I brought my book,' writes the child, 'nearer my face, for I was red as fire. I felt as if a sharp knife was thrusting itself into my chest. I began to tremble so violently that I could scarcely hold the book. I was afraid of fainting, but the book saved me. For some minutes, so as to calm myself, I pretended to look for my place. I said my lesson in a voice shaken by my trembling breath. I summoned up all my courage as I did before to throw myself from the bridge into the swimming bath, and said to myself that I must get myself under control. I did a dictation so as not to have time to speak.'

Then, the lesson over, carefully simulating an easy, light-hearted manner, she sat down to play the piano: determinedly she forced her fingers, 'stiff and cold' as they had become, to strike the keys. The Princess<sup>1</sup> came and asked me to teach her croquet. "With pleasure," I replied gaily: but my voice and breathing were still shaky.'

Marie ran to dress. She looked at herself in the glass. Curious! No figure of tragedy stared back at her: no, there confronting her was merely the usual familiar girl with young face and pale corn-coloured hair.

The carriage came round. Her aunt got in, and Marie got in. As they drove along, one thought worked to and fro, to and fro in her mind like a saw. 'He is going to get married! is it

<sup>1</sup> Her aunt, Princess Eristoff.

possible? I am unhappy! not unhappy as at other times about the wall-paper in one room and the furniture in another, but really unhappy!'

On their road they passed the empty villa where the Duke's mistress had lived. To-day it was open, and with hammer and chisel workmen buzzed about it. To them it was merely a villa like any other villa; the Russian child driving by with staring eyes, merely any child who drove by and stared.

As undercurrent to her grief was another thought: that she must herself tell the news to the Princess, and somehow manage to tell it naturally. She seems to have felt that if her aunt heard it from others and then spoke to her about it, that would be still more unbearable. She waited till they were indoors. It was growing dark and the lamps were lit. Marie watched her opportunity. The Princess was sitting on the sofa: she, Marie, was sitting with a lamp behind her: her face she knew could not be seen. Now was the moment . . . now! She made up the sentence in her mind, she forced it on to her lips.

'Have you heard the news, Princess . . . the Duke of Hamilton is going to be married.'

It was over. 'At last! I have said it. I have not gone red, I am calm, but what I feel like inside! . . . Ever since the unfortunate moment when that saucy baggage told me this horror I have been as breathless as if I had run for an hour.'

Again she sat down to the piano. Again she tried to work off her intolerable pain on to those white and black keys: but it was no use: 'In the middle of the fugue my fingers went weak and I leaned back in the chair. I tried again—the same thing—and for five minutes at least I began and broke off. Something formed in my throat that stopped my breathing. Ten times I leapt from piano to balcony. *Mon dieu!* O what a condition to be in! . . . O God, save me from unhappiness!'

'It is finished! . . . finished! . . . My face goes purple when I think that it is over! . . .'

But no, it could not be true! It was not possible—not possible because, if it were, it would be more than her spirit could bear. Within a day or so she had hoodwinked herself into believing it was a false report. 'To-day I am happy, I am

gay at being able to believe it's not true, for the terrible news hasn't been repeated.'

On the Thursday she was sitting playing the piano when the papers were brought in. She picked up *Galignani's Messenger* and the first lines her eyes fell on were an announcement of the Duke's marriage. 'The paper did not fall from my hands, on the contrary my fingers remained clutching it. I hadn't the strength to stand up, I sat down and reread those terrible lines ten times over, to completely convince myself that I was not dreaming. O Divine Charity! what have I read? This evening I can't write. I throw myself down on my knees and sob. Mama came in, and so that she shouldn't see me like this I pretended to go and see if tea were ready. And I've got to have a Latin lesson! What torture! . . . I can't settle to anything, I can't keep still.'

For some reason she felt now that she must leave the Duke out of her prayers, and in all her misery it was this which perhaps cut deepest. 'To separate myself from this prayer seems impossible . . . I cry like a fool . . . the torture of changing this prayer. Oh! it's the most cruel feeling in the world, it is the end of everything.'

But change it she must and did. 'I have finished my prayer, I have left out the prayer for him . . . I felt as if my heart was being torn out of me, as if I saw the coffin of some well-beloved being carried away. . . .'

But in spite of the sense of desolation within her she managed to keep up outwardly a successful show of light-heartedness. To let her family guess what she was suffering—that at all cost must be avoided. 'I am very talkative, especially when I'm crying inside. No one would suspect it. I sing, laugh, joke, and the unhappier I am the gayer I am. To-day I can't move my tongue, I've hardly eaten anything.' 'It is the greatest grief,' she writes, thinking of what she has lost, 'that can happen to a woman, I know what it is! . . . sad mockery!'

The days went on: the family life went on. Sometimes in her casual intimate way Marie draws aside the curtain and we see the Bashkirtseffs at a meal or involved in some family dispute. Marie and Paul coming in one day late for dinner,

having had a meal elsewhere. Paul scolded by Madame Bashkirtseff. The grandfather standing up for Paul who, annoyed at so much fuss, 'goes off muttering like a servant.' The grandfather then precipitating himself after his grandson, and Marie after the grandfather. 'Grandpapa began to shout, that made me laugh; all these tantrums always make me laugh and then feel sorry for all these unhappy creatures who have no sorrows and who martyrize themselves because of having nothing to do. *Mon Dieu*, if I were ten years older! . . .

'After dinner, I sang, and enchanted all the tempestuous family.' Within Marie every day and hour the sap of growing life was pushing up, and the sap continued to rise, her young vigour to expand, while hidden within her mind the bruise remained. With a balance of mind surprising in a child she realized that time would inevitably lessen this aching sense of loss. 'To say my grief would be eternal would be ridiculous, nothing is eternal! But the fact is that at present I can't think of anything else . . . Oh . . . I don't want to see him with her! They are at Baden, at Baden that I used to be so fond of! Those promenades where I used to see him, those kiosks, those shops! . . .' 'He was,' she writes another day, 'within my mind like a lamp, and this lamp has gone out. It is dark, sombre, sad, one doesn't know which way to go. Before in my small troubles I always found a support, a light that guided me . . . and now, however much I look . . . I find nothing but emptiness. It is finished, well, it is finished!'

We have not many other diary entries this year. For her a blight lay over everything. She tried to take the same interest as before in her voice, the voice that was to have sung her into the earthly paradise her leaping imagination had fabricated. 'I begin to think seriously about my voice. I was so anxious to sing . . .' 'Was so anxious' . . . inevitably everything now turned into the past tense. Well, it was over: done with: there was no good dilating on her unhappiness. . . . 'I love him and I have lost him,' she writes finally at the end of the month, 'that is all I can say, and that says more than everything in the world. My sorrow,' she continues, in her careful investigatory way, 'is no longer acute . . . but dulled, calm, reasonable: it is not for that any weaker.'

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But as the weeks succeeded each other, building up their impalpable barrier of time between herself and the past, a fear came to her that a day might come when she would actually forget . . . actually be indifferent to what she had once known. Ah! if only she could always keep that little hushed place within her mind where grew those tender, those enchanted flowers. Some instinct perhaps warned her that not again would she ever know quite such radiance of living, and seeing her future self forgetful, indifferent, she cried out, 'I conjure you, do not forget! When you read these lines, turn back to the past, think that you are thirteen, that you are at Nice, that it is actually happening at the time! think that it is alive then! . . . you will understand! . . . you will be happy! . . .'

\* \* \* \* \*

To describe this kind of emotional adventure of a child, this first mazed awakening in the fields of Aphrodite, there is a much used expression which only to an obtuse mind could seem appropriate; but as clumsiness of perception is a characteristic of the generality of mankind it is quite natural that in cases of this sort, feeling the need for a metaphor, they should look for it in the farmyard.

## Chapter Three

### THE BASHKIRTSEFFS GIVE A PARTY

The Bashkirtseff's were not entirely fixed at Nice. This year, 1873, we read of their going to Vienna, and at the end of July the following year they paid a visit to Paris. These departures were scenes of incredible excitement and confusion: everyone ran, shouted, forgot, remembered, and then again shouted and ran. Such a scrimmage, in fact, that sometimes in the middle of trying to get themselves off they would realize it was really beyond their powers, and giving it up in desperation would decide to go another day instead. And it was not only the Nice contingent of the family who suffered from this curious inability to start. Marie's uncle, Etienne Babanine, had intended leaving Russia in the April of this year, but did not succeed in getting himself on the move till July. 'He hasn't the courage for anything,' derides Marie. 'What a character!'

Nearly ten months had passed since the day when her governess had said, 'Do you know the Duke of H[amilton] is going to marry . . . ?' and during the passing of these months, imperceptibly but steadily, Marie's mind had reknit itself. Her love had not lessened but the sense of loss had lessened, and by now her exuberance of living was bubbling up again, strong as ever.

Paris went to her head completely. 'I hope to enter the world,' she writes while there, 'this world that I call to, that I cry to upon my knees, for it is my life, my happiness. I begin to live and to try and realize my dreams of becoming celebrated. . . . I look at myself in the glass and see that I am pretty. . . . O God, in giving me this slight beauty (I say slight out of modesty) it is still too much coming from you, O my God! . . . I feel I shall succeed in everything. Everything smiles on me and I am happy, happy. . . . !

'The sound of Paris, this hotel big as a town, with everyone

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always on the move, talking, reading, smoking, staring, makes me giddy. I love Paris and my heart beats. I want to live quicker, quicker, quicker. . . . It is true I'm afraid this wish to live at full speed foretells a short life. Who knows? . . . No, I want no melancholy.'

But to cry, 'I am happy,' is not wise. For some reason, to acclaim the goddess of joy too vociferously seems to annoy; hardly have the acclamations of delight reached her ears before, to the bewilderment of her devotee, she vanishes. And so it was with Marie. Hot on the delirium of Paris came disaster.

It appears it was now for the first time that she became definitely aware of a factor that, ever since she and her family had arrived at Nice, had been at work around them. This factor was the hostile attitude of Nice society. From the very first, Nice had eyed the Bashkirtseffs with suspicion. Who was this family, come from God-knows-where in Russia? Why had they been travelling about in this vagabond manner? Where was the husband of that pretty-looking Madame Bashkirtseff? Where did their money come from? Yes! their money! That was a much, a very much debated question. Nemesis, in fact, had not altogether slept as regards Aunt Sophie. On the contrary, rumours of her peculiar method of obtaining a husband had travelled with her. So too had the news of the lawsuit over the Romanoff money: so too, it seems, had stories of the misdemeanours of the scandalous George. Then too there were curious reports as to how the Bashkirtseffs borrowed money from their dependants. No: most decidedly there was a lack of normality, of social stability, about these Bashkirtseffs! Especially, it seems, did Nice disapproval fasten on Marie. At that time there were far more rigid rules on women's behaviour than now: there were, for instance, certain well-defined ways of dressing: childhood, youth, middle-age, old age, each had its appropriate materials, styles, and colours. By keeping to these a woman showed that she bowed her head to the decrees of life, that as each successive age passed over her she was undergoing the sentiments it was proper she should undergo at each particular period. Not to conform to these accepted rules showed a shocking irregularity, if not impropriety, of mind; raised a strong suspicion that the offender was

experiencing feelings that it was not, at that given age, allowable she should feel.

All these rules Marie ignored. She, Marie, dress like any other girl in the schoolroom! She was going to be an exceptional human being, and her dress too should be exceptional. She thought, but thought wrongly, that she could make Nice accept her on her own terms instead of on theirs. Constantly she would write off to Paris for clothes, and Worth and Lafarrière would busy themselves with her orders. Her height of daring was a white skating dress, trimmed all round with deep-hanging ostrich feather, yards and yards of it. She notes it in her diary with pride. The Nice eyes noted it too, and grew colder as they noted.

As regards the Bashkirtseff's habit of borrowing money from their dependants during moments of financial barrenness, it cannot be denied. It was said that they were always doing this sort of thing. That may, or may not, have been true. Certainly, whatever they did or did not do, the name with which Nice dubbed them was going too far. It was not a pleasant name. 'The family of a hundred crimes:' that was what Nice called the Bashkirtseffs.

How much of all this animosity Marie now became aware of we do not know, but she was certainly aware of a good deal. 'I have not yet harmed anyone,' she writes, 'and already they have injured, slandered, humiliated me!' And later, she writes adjuring herself to lift herself up 'as much as possible above others; to be powerful!... No matter how!... Then one is feared and respected. Then one is strong, and that is the height of human felicity, because then one's fellow creatures are muzzled, either by cowardice or something else, and don't bite you. Isn't it strange to hear me reasoning in this way? Yes, but these reasonings of a young dog like myself are a fresh proof of what the world is worth... it must be thoroughly steeped in nastiness and wickedness to have so saddened me in such a short time.' But all the same, 'I love life,' she writes, 'in spite of everything, I want to live. It would be cruel, to make me die when I am so accommodating... my body weeps and cries; but something in me, that is above me, rejoices in everything.'

#### FOUNTAINS OF YOUTH

'Whatever one may say,' she writes another day, 'life is an extremely beautiful thing . . . if one doesn't look into it too closely one can live happily.'

After Paris, on their way back to Nice in September, Marie and her aunt spent a few hours at Marseilles, the object of this visit being to raise money on the ever-obliging Aunt Sophie's diamonds. It was certainly fortunate that the Nice critics did not know of this expedition! Arrived at Marseilles, Aunt Sophie went off while Marie apparently remained at the hotel, reading a novel which she had picked up on a railway stall: however, it proved so abominably written that she threw it out of the window and settled down to Herodotus. Aunt Sophie, meanwhile, was laying herself open to the derision of her fly-man by demanding to be driven to that part of the town 'where diamonds are preserved'.

'Poor aunt,' writes Marie, when Aunt Sophie returned after a most unpleasant time spent haggling with most unpleasant people, 'Poor aunt! I prostrate myself before her. What places she has been to! What people she has interviewed! And all for me!' They giggled together over 'this place where diamonds are preserved', and then at midday, leaving Marseilles and all its smells behind them, went on to Nice.

A nostalgia for that familiar place grew stronger within Marie the nearer they approached it. Paris might be wonderful, but Nice was still the central nerve of her existence. Even if it no longer held the Duke of Hamilton, there still hung about it the aroma of what had been. By the time she and Aunt Sophie arrived, Nice was enwrapped in the gathering dusk. 'There it is, this Mediterranean after which I used to sigh! These black trees! . . . Stillness, silence: dimness barely lit by the hidden moon; just a few carriage lamps that glide along one after another.

'I go to my room, to my dressing-room; I open the window to see the castle, the same as ever . . . I am a little tired, but I love Nice! . . . I love Nice!'

This coming back after six or seven weeks stirred the past afresh, and the next morning she went out to visit all the well-remembered landmarks of house and street: 'I walk along silently . . . gathering up my memories scattered all over the

#### THE BASHKIRTSEFFS GIVE A PARTY

Promenade. Nice, for me, is the *Promenade des Anglais*. Each house, each tree, each telegraph pole is a reminder, pleasant or unpleasant, amorous or ordinary.... Everything is the same: even to that smell of wood peculiar to new furniture.' And, later, her mind turning to the man who had so enhanced the value of these familiar objects, she writes: 'I have dared to compare all the people I have liked with the Duke. Strange as it is, every time he comes back to me as forcefully as ever and I thank God for it, for he is my light. Oh! what a difference! how I remember!... All my happiness was in seeing him... I still love him and I shall always love him.... 'How good it is to talk of him!... When I think of it all, I can't write much, I ponder, I love, and that is everything.'

#### 2

By the end of 1875 Marie, now nearly fifteen, more than ever champed at the slow progress of her days, 'Oh! I am tired of my obscurity. I grow parched from inaction.... The sun, the sun!....

'In what way will it come to me? When? Where? How? I don't the least want to know, so long as it comes!' She does not feel any necessity to explain what 'it' is. Nor is it necessary. As she says in another place: 'Oh you know what I want! I want to be famous!' But when there seemed no chance of this quickening of her life, when, looking ahead, she saw the inevitable procession of slow, relentless weeks, she would adjure herself to be patient: 'Come, courage, this time is only a passage leading me to where I want to be.'

While awaiting the world audience which she demanded she formed a more humble one not far from her own door. One day she had gone with her aunt into the town to buy some fruit near the church Saint Reparate. The women of the quarter crowded round Marie, and pleased at this easily won attention she began in a low voice to sing *Rossigno che vola*. If the women had been attracted by her before, they were now enchanted, and some of them began to dance, while the apple-woman dropped her a curtsey, crying out: 'Che bella regina!' 'In a word,' says Marie, 'popular triumph.'

Well . . . it was better than nothing.

At the end of December the Bashkirtseffs decided to give a party, an evening party. How far by now Madame Bashkirtseff and Aunt Sophie had penetrated into Nice society we do not know. They were, at any rate, on such terms with certain members of it that they felt they could at least go so far as to invite them to a party.<sup>1</sup> Then, too, there were the Bashkirtseff's sprinkling of English and Russian friends. Taking one thing with another, it seemed as if it might do very well: that the party might be quite a success. Having once decided to give it, it was evident that they must do it well: these Nice people must at all costs be impressed, be made to feel that they had not come to their house for nothing. The Bashkirtseffs decided they would have the famous Diaz de Soria to sing. Here was just what was needed: just the flourish that could not fail to make the desired impression.

We can be fairly certain that for this great occasion boxes of new clothes arrived from Paris for all the women of the Bashkirtseff family. Those yards of stuff that in the 'sixties had been extended over the steel frame of the crinoline were, in the 'seventies, heaped up chiefly to the back of the figure, while above them, suggestive of a swan's breast up-curving from the water on which it floats, rose the corset-curved human body, it too as if afloat on the multitudinous ripples and waves of material. And these cascades of drapery, swirling, bunching, festooning, did, even if slightly grotesque, undoubtedly give a dramatic and effective set-off to the tight-corsetted body above. The hair was piled high and narrow, and on the very top would be perched a little object looking like a minute basket outbursting with flowers, feathers, and ribbons. When looked at closely it could be seen that this exquisite little fantasy was a tiny hat.

This being an evening party the women of the Bashkirtseff family would naturally be hatless and in evening dress, but their outline would have been that of these human swans. And let us take too a look at the men of the family, the old grand-

<sup>1</sup> The date of this party is not perfectly clear, but as Marie's entries in her Diary at this time have every appearance of referring to it, I have placed it accordingly.

#### THE BASHKIRTSEFFS GIVE A PARTY

father, Paul, and Walitsky. Men's clothes of that day, as seen in their little carte-de-visite photographs, have to our eyes a curiously home-made air, the line of coat-sleeve and trouser-leg more or less following the natural line of the figure: the modern tailor's ideal, the parallelogram man, would have seemed nearly as peculiar to the people of the 'seventies as would have the egg-shaped Elizabethan. In one particular the men and women of the 'seventies were markedly different to those of to-day. Instead of the minimum of hair we now allow ourselves they grew as much of it as possible. The more the better; the thicker the more admired. Little girls would have their entire back hidden under a rippling mane; women, as we have seen, piled their hair up ten or twelve inches high; men let theirs lie on their head in natural, loose disorder; their mouth was hidden under a monster moustache that curved downward to meet the forward curved whisker, and very likely a beard too would flow down their chest. It was a hirsute age.

Such then would have been the general appearance of the Bashkirtseff family when dressed for their party. In imagination we can see them ready and waiting, wandering about the big rooms, taking stock of the arrangements, pushing the chairs about on which their guests were to sit and listen to Diaz de Soria. These figures, these palms and aspidistras in their china pots that were the usual drawing-room *décor* of the day, would all have been steeped in the effulgence falling from high-hanging gas chandeliers—half a dozen or so white globes in a circle: for this horrid affair of metal and china had replaced the fairy beauty of the crystal chandelier.

All was ready. Diaz de Soria arrived: the guests began to arrive.

This sounds perfect, but in reality it was very far from perfect, for though the guests arrived there were very few of them, and they were the Bashkirtseffs' English and Russian friends only. As the evening went on it became apparent that these were the only guests they were going to have. And so, in the end, it was. Not a single member of Nice society appeared.

Exactly how much the Bashkirtseffs suspected this beforehand; whether their invitations had not been answered or

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whether false hopes had been raised by their being accepted—these things we do not know. But what we do know is that Nice society had made up its mind. Quite definitely they were not going to the Bashkirtseffs' party: not a single one of them. Why should they? Did the Babanines trace their descent from the first Tartar invasion? To Nice it meant nothing. Was old Monsieur Babanine an enthusiast over the poems of Lord Byron, and had he once chattered to Pushkin? It left Nice cold. Had Alexander II admired Madame Bashkirtseff? That helped not one iota. This was one aspect of the case, and further there was in especial that absurd girl, Marie Bashkirtseff, who dressed nearly always in white: 'the white creature,' so they had nicknamed her. This child who slept in a cockle-shell bed in a room only fit for an actress! Who sang to the market women! Who rushed along the promenade without a hat! Who skated at the rink with yards of ostrich feather flying round her! No . . . most decidedly, no!

\* \* \* \* \*

Meanwhile the party was pursuing its disastrous course. Certain social failures can be covered up, but lack of guests at a party is not one of them. Those stretches of empty carpet that should have been hidden but which everywhere hit the eye: those spaces that should have been filled with jostling bodies but were not: those few, only too clearly heard voices that should have been submerged in a general chatter: that meagre collection of hands barely stirring the silence with their ghostly clapping . . . the evening that was to have been an occasion of triumph and happiness was one of failure and humiliation.

At last it was over. The few guests had gone. Diaz de Soria had gone.

And Marie? The sense of humiliation was inside her like a flame that scorched and went on scorching. Nice had snubbed them before, but this was a flag of insult waved in their face. 'I feel cold, my mouth burns. I know that it is unworthy of a strong spirit to give way to a paltry annoyance, to gnaw my nails because of the scorn of a town like Nice, but . . .'

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'Again just now I fell on my knees, sobbing and imploring God, arms extended and eyes staring in front of me, just as if God were there, in my room!

'It seems that God does not hear me; all the same I cry out loud enough.... At this moment I am so desperate, so unhappy that I wish for nothing! If all the sneering society of Nice came and knelt before me I should not budge!

'O God, will all my life be like this? ... What is so ghastly with me is that past humiliations don't slip from my mind, but leave their disgusting marks! You will never understand my position ... you will laugh ... God, take pity on me, and hear me. I swear to you I believe in you.' Yes, but did she? Could she, after all that had happened, believe in him quite as much as before? Feel quite so certain that he was the indulgent Super-Babanine she had originally taken him to be? There had been the affair with the Duke... and now this party.... Perhaps, all things considered, she had better try to placate him: lay herself out deliberately to please. 'O God, if you give me the life I want, I promise you ... to go from Kharkoff to Keiff on foot like the pilgrims. If, further, you satisfy my ambition and make me altogether happy I promise to go to Jerusalem and do a tenth of the journey on foot.'

Considering the distance of Jerusalem from Nice the offer was generous, but having stated her terms her conscience grew uneasy: this bargaining seemed somehow to lack the genuine religious flavour. 'Saints have made vows,' she adds, a trifle shamefacedly, 'yes, but I have the air of making conditions. No, God sees my intention is good, and if I am doing wrong he will forgive me.'

Meanwhile she had to continue the days bearing her bruised self-esteem. The horror of not being able to separate herself from this thing that had been humiliated! To be herself actually that trampled-on degraded creature! It was intolerable.... Frantic to escape from her own thoughts she would rush to the piano and break into the most frenzied galop.

The elder members of the family too had to readjust their minds to this social landslide. Aunt Sophie on these kind of occasions would take a defiant attitude, exclaiming that 'she didn't care for anyone or anything.' But that, unfortunately, is

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a remark more effective when it comes from victor than from vanquished.

As for Marie, the hostility of Nice had burnt itself into her like a corrosive, and the marks were to remain for life. It hardened her ambitions, redoubled her thirst for success, for *la gloire*: that alone could heal these scars. And made aware now what a weak position in life hers was, she realized that to win this success, to make the impression she intended to make, she must have some effective weapon with which to do it. She must put all her trust in, bank all her hopes on, her voice. Except for that what was there left? 'Through what,' she relentlessly asks herself, 'am I going to be raised up? And how? Oh, chimeras!...'

'I am capable of great things, but what is the good of it when I live in a dark corner, ignored by everyone? ... The multitude, that is everything. What use to me are a few superior beings, I must have the whole world, I must have glitter, commotion.... When I think that ... one must come back to the eternally boring and necessary.... Wait!... Oh, if you knew what it costs me to wait!'

Yes: she had to wait, but ultimately success must, would come. As she lay at night in her cockle-shell bed with the lace curtains drawn round her, now more than ever that was the last thought printed on her mind before it misted with sleep: the first when, in the morning, her consciousness slid back into its accustomed grooves.

## Chapter Four

### A BALCONY IN ROME

In the January of 1876 Marie, Dina, Madame Bashkirtseff, and Dina's mother, Lola Babanine, were at Rome. 'Well, I must work, as that is what I am at Rome for,' wrote Marie. But actually, whether she knew it or not, she was there for her health. The dreary atmosphere of an Italian hotel of the 'seventies, the aloof anonymity of these rooms and passages depressed her. 'I am like some wretched plant that has been transplanted. I look out the window and, instead of the Mediterranean, I see dirty houses; . . . by the other window . . . instead of the castle I see the hotel corridor.' And what made everything worse was having only a part of the family with her instead of the whole. 'If at least we were all together!' she sighs, 'What a mad idea to separate like this! . . . Never, never again will we split in two. It would be a hundred times better if we were together, grandpapa, my aunt, everybody, and Walitsky.' Away from Nice her hours of boredom there were forgotten; imprisoned in this hotel, she looked back on it with nostalgia. 'O Nice, Nice . . . is it possible to live in any other town. . . . Bah! I shall get used to it!'

The monotony of these winter weeks was relieved one day by a visit to the Vatican. In an effort to look their best for the occasion the two girls had in a hairdresser, but by the time he had finished massing up Marie's long yellow coils he had ruined her appearance. 'In ten minutes I changed the whole thing, and we set off to the Vatican.' Arrived, the little Bashkirtseff group followed a red-damasked servant up four enormous staircases, each in a different coloured marble, then across a vast court, the size of which satisfied Marie's curious thirst for the colossal. 'In seeing this immensity I would not have the Popes done away with. They are already great in having made such greatness,' she remarks with verbal felicity but some confusion of values. They finally arrived in the room

where they were to wait for the Pope. An hour and a quarter after the time fixed for their audience the door opened, and an advance guard of uniformed officials appeared, followed by the Pope surrounded by cardinals. The Pope supported himself with an ivory cane, and his lower lip hung down 'like an old dog's'. The Bashkirtseffs knelt, and he put his hand on Marie's head in a way, so she noticed, to press it down further. Then he gave a short address; ending up: 'It is only little by little that one can deserve one's fatherland, but this fatherland is not London, it is not St. Petersburg, it is not Paris, it is heaven! One must not wait till the last day of one's life . . . not behave as people do at the approach of the Jubilee. Is not that so?' he queried, turning to one of his cardinals.

'The cardinal addressed,' goes on Marie, 'began to laugh, as did all the others. It must have had some special meaning for them, and the Holy Father went off very pleased and very smiling.' Meanwhile, she noticed that 'The way some of the cardinals stared at me we might have been coming away from the opera at Nice.'

## 2

One day in February when the Bashkirtseffs came back from a drive at about six o'clock they noticed, as they got out of their carriage, that two young men were watching them. While the Russian party were at dinner these two men, by changing their position, managed to keep their eye on the windows. Naturally the Bashkirtseffs were very amused at this silent interest shown in their doings. Madame Bashkirtseff and Dina were flattered and full of laughter, but Marie, more worldly-wise than the others, sent her maid Léonie over to a shop opposite, telling her to take a good look at these two Italians and try to make out what kind of men they were. Léonie went off, and returned with the gladdening news that they were undoubtedly gentlemen. After this, Marie too succumbed to the general hilarity, and the rest of the evening was spent in making jokes at the expense of their admirers whom at intervals they surreptitiously peeped at through the blinds. For five hours the two young men stood and stared at the windows,

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obviously waiting in the hope of the Bashkirtseffs' coming out to go to opera or party. It was a wretched evening; the rain poured down, and the wind blew the wet along the street, even snow began to fall, but still the waiting figures did not budge. Marie was deliciously flattered. Five hours of silent, persistent admiration! Surely in those drenched, dinnerless young men could be read a portent of coming fame! 'These two angels stayed till a quarter to eleven . . . what legs anyone must have to remain standing for five hours!'

Marie felt not the least doubt that she was the magnet that was drawing this attention. One did not expect this sort of thing to happen to Dina. For Dina, in spite of her nineteen years, her waterfall of fair hair, and amazingly sweet disposition made little appeal to men, and if one of them did happen to pay her any attention she went red in the face from excitement. Marie, on the contrary, had remarkable self-assurance for her fifteen years.

The Bashkirtseffs had a negro boy, Fortuné, as a servant. He seems at this time to have been not much more than a child, and to have specially attended on Marie. To her he was a perpetual source of amusement. This negro boy with his black tight-curled wool, and glistening eyes, was to Marie what a Pekinese is to the woman of to-day. In having this dusky attendant she was filching an idea from the century before. In the middle ages the jester: later, the dwarf: in the eighteenth century, black Pompey: in the nineteenth, the pet monkey: in the twentieth, the Pekinese: and in every century, the clown. Mankind seems always to need this grotesque element at its elbow to provide the necessary easing-off from the strain of life; this mute flattery of comparison with a being more ungainly and more inconsequent than itself. Subconsciously the race of man needs encouragement. In Marie's case she was, too, probably well aware how Fortuné's oily blackness and splayed features threw into startling relief her own porcelain fairness.

Fortuné was with the Bashkirtseffs at Rome, and one evening Madame Bashkirtseff sent him out to buy some paper. It was now a week since the night that the two young men had kept vigil in the rain, and every evening since then one or other of

them had taken up his stand in the same place. One of them was there now as Fortuné came out and, waylaying him, entered into a long conversation, which Fortuné, on his return, repeated to the Bashkirtseffs. The negro boy was charmed to play his part as messenger of Aphrodite to the bevy of excited ladies who confronted him, and his manner of telling his story, ‘hands crossed behind his back, one foot stuck out in front, mouth stretching from ear to ear,’ and eyes rolling in their sockets, convulsed the Bashkirtseffs, while Aunt Lola laughed so much that for several minutes she ‘nearly swooned’.

‘I went downstairs to get some paper,’ began Fortuné, ‘when this gentleman spoke to me. He said: “Is this where these ladies live?” I said, “Yes.” Then he said, “If they would pay a visit to the villa, I would send a coupé or a landau to fetch them, whatever they would like.” Then I said that you did not know him. Then he said, “Yes,” that you did know him. “The mother of these young ladies knows me and we meet each other every evening at the *Villa Borghese* and at the *Pincio*.” Then I talked to him so much that he gave me his card. Then I brought it you, and went downstairs. He again spoke to me. Then I told him the ladies had forbidden me to talk, and then he said: “I am going home to write a letter; in half an hour I shall be back and you will come down to take it.” Then I said to him that I couldn’t come down every instant. Then he said: “If the ladies will let down a string I will tie it on to my letter and they can draw it up to the balcony. Have the ladies got any string?” Then I said that you did not know him. Then he said: “Let these ladies say who can present me to them, and I will go and find this person.” Then I said nothing, then he said it was for the young lady who was at the *Villa Borghese* yesterday, in black with her hair hanging down.... Then he said if you will pay a visit to his villa he will have people there and go there himself to show it you and, if you’d like, he will send his carriage for you....’

It was Dina whose hair hung down, therefore it was Dina, and not Marie, who was the object of this ardour! Dina, of course, went red in the face and, a little surprisingly for anyone so self-effacing, began slightly to give herself airs: ‘She is disagreeable when she gives herself these airs!’ remarks

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Marie, but adds, 'This gentleman has a villa, he must have money. *Dieu!* if he married Dina! I want it more than anything, and just now some dresses have come from Worth, and hers is all covered with white flowers like orange blossom.'

But Fortuné had made a mistake. In spite of Monsieur Worth's apparent prescience it was finally discovered that it was Marie, and not Dina, who was the chosen; and Dina, after this hectic and all too brief experience of the limelight, returned to her usual position in the wings.

Soon, through the auspices of a friend, the young Italian was introduced. He was Count Pietro Antonelli, nephew of Cardinal Antonelli, and a figure of importance in Roman society. He was tall and thin, with a seduction of manner that countered any lack of breadth of shoulder: his chestnut eyes did more than merely reflect objects, and the modulations of his voice brought within his grasp most things that he needed. On his upper lip lay the dark down of his twenty-three years.

Just on the threshold of Marie's adolescence this young man had stepped forward as if in welcome. On the Italianate air Cupid had flown in at her window. Wherever she went now, she met Pietro, and soon a charming little affair was in full swing between them. The Duke of Hamilton had oriented her child life: already she had known the grief of love. Pietro Antonelli was to teach her another, a lighter and more joyous side: about their relationship was the atmosphere of some gay little Parisian comedy: a comedy of which the theatrical properties were street baskets of spring flowers, the foam of tulle ball-dresses from Worth and Lafarrière, flung handfuls of confetti, sprays of mignonette and roses, riding habits *à la Amazone*, carnival clowns, tight-pressed bouquets in frilled paper, velvet masks with drooping lace to hang over the young mouth that laughed beneath, the vertiginous swing and sway of valses by Strauss.

For the first time Marie knew what it was to stand in the full sunshine of a man's admiration. The episode with the Duke had taken place entirely in her mind, but in the Antonelli affair she had her own part to play with this seductive *vis-à-vis*. The effect upon her was like a delicate intoxication of all her senses,

it was a.... No, she could not say what it was. Struggling for literary sincerity, she tried to get on to paper precisely and in detail what she felt... what, for instance, exactly happened to her when she saw Antonelli coming in at the door.... Not that he made a particularly effective entrance: lean Antonelli with his curious little wobbling movement at the knee had none of the Olympian splendour of the Duke, but all the same he was giving Marie a new and bewildering experience and, wisely, she made the most of it. 'In this world one must make the best of things! Life is so beautiful and so short.' She was like a violin that the Duke had, all unknowingly, tuned up for Antonelli to play on. And this 'wretched son of a priest' as she called him knew just how to do it, just how to give disturbing meaning to conversational nothings.

'How many times,' he asked her, 'have you been in love?'

'Twice.'

'Oh! Oh!'

'Possibly even more often.'

'How much I should like to be the *more*.'

This was in the setting of a masked ball, the first Marie had been to. 'I have,' she writes, 'only seen men out walking, at the theatre, or at our own house. *Dieu*, how different they are at a masked ball! So grand and exclusive in their carriages; so eager, so impudent, and so silly here!'

When Marie left the ball Antonelli appropriated her glove, 'You know,' he said as he kissed her hand, 'I don't say I shall always carry this glove next my heart, that would be stupid, but it will be a charming remembrance.' For Antonelli was gradually becoming fonder of this Greuze-faced child than he allowed to be seen, being an adept at veiling his eagerness with a languorous manner. When his slow glance fell on her, from beneath his half-dropped lids glided something dark, soft, mysterious: his gaze enwrapped her like a cloak.... The effect Marie found strangely disturbing: it 'goes to my head.'

It was February now, and spring lay in shafts of sunlight along the Roman streets. Rome, at first found by Marie so depressing had become Elysian: 'I was bored... because I had no one to think about.... All is changed.' Her life was hum-

ming like a top. On the twenty-third of the month there was to be a carnival, and on the balconies men were moving about in the sunshine draping the balustrades with bright coloured stuffs, blue and rose, yellow and red.

When the day itself came, the Bashkirtseffs congregated on their balcony: flower-decked carriages were driving by: at intervals still more flowers were tossed up to where they stood. 'Dina was red in the face and her mother radiant.' A young man (referred to as Count B.) on the next balcony to theirs gave Marie a bouquet, but her eyes were searching the mob beneath for a now familiar figure. Then, suddenly, there he was, her Cardinalino. Dina threw him a bouquet: another man caught it, but Antonelli 'with the greatest coolness took him by the neck and held him with his sensitive hands, so slow was the wretch in giving up his prize.' From her balcony Marie watched the two men standing there in this silent hostile grip. She was startled at the effect Antonelli's quiet determination had on her: 'Perhaps you will laugh at what I am going to tell you, but I shall tell it you all the same. Well, by such an action a man can make himself loved in a moment. His manner was so calm while he strangled the wretch that I lost my breath; going red again, I gave him a camellia and the string fell down with it. He took it up, put it in his pocket and disappeared....'

Then came the race of riderless horses along the street. The exhilaration of it! This rush of horses thundering by in scorching sunlight. The hoots, the yells of the mob! How well the south understands humanity's need at times to let go completely—to scream, to exult, to go savage. And for Marie, standing there on the balcony with her eager face, there was too the exquisite awareness of Antonelli hovering somewhere near—really, almost was the draught of life too heady....

'Three-quarters of an hour later,' writes Marie, 'when my flirtation with my neighbour was at its height, I saw at the end of a long stick an immense bouquet all decked out with gold paper carried by a rascal who didn't know whom to give it to, when a cane, resting on the balcony, made him lean it towards me. It was Antonelli's return for my camellia.' It was a monster bouquet: lying there at Marie's feet, a heavy

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crush of flowers, it was like a visible symbol of this unparalleled day. With some difficulty she picked it up.

'Oh! it's splendid!' cried an English woman near her.

'*E bello veramente!*' exclaimed Count B . . . looking a little annoyed.

'It's charming!' said Marie, and over the top of the flowers her face smiled down at Antonelli.

That evening, whatever the others talked about, Marie kept interrupting with: 'Isn't Antonelli adorable?' To say it, to say it again, and yet again, what a curious delicious pleasure it gave her! 'I say it as a joke but I'm afraid of really thinking it . . . I'd like to sleep to shorten the time till I can go on the balcony again.'

A few days later there was further racing on the Course, and again the Bashkirtseffs congregated on their balcony. When Marie herself stepped out of the window she found the carnival animation already at full tide. Down in the crowd her eye caught sight of Antonelli with a friend. Oh that rush of blood to her face whenever she saw him, it was abominable! She stepped back to hide herself, noticed at the same time that Antonelli had disappeared, and that behind her her mother was holding out her hand to someone who had just come in. She turned round and discovered this someone was Antonelli.

'What do you do with yourself?' asked Antonelli in his 'calm, gentle manner'. 'You don't go to the theatre any more.'

'I have been ill, my finger's still bad.'

'Where?' said Antonelli trying to take her hand, 'you know each evening I go to the Apollo and I only stay there five minutes.'

'Why?'

'Why?'

'Yes, why?'

'Because I go there for you and you're not there.'

And a little later, 'Give me a rose.'

'Why should I?'

Naturally this conversation was of far greater interest to Marie than it is to the reader, for this kind of thing written down is, compared to when the words were spoken, like a

dried and pressed flower, and that same flower when, upreared on its stalk, it was afloat in light and air. However, so charming are these two as they stand there laughing in the sunshine that we will loiter and eavesdrop a few moments longer.

“Look at that tube”, says Marie pointing to a man in a long overcoat and fantastic hat. “If you could flatten him out I’d give you a rose.” After that it was a sight for the gods. Antonelli and Plowden each trying their hardest to throw old bouquets at this man’s head, who waking up, in his turn began throwing them at us. I was protected by the Cardinalino and Plowden, [a friend of the Bashkirtseffs] and the bouquets . . . fell all round me. In the end a window and a street lamp got broken. It was most interesting.’

## 3

It was impossible for Marie and Antonelli to be so much together without Rome becoming aware of it and, once aware, to start talking. Antonelli’s parents began to bestir themselves and to make enquiries: and as usual when enquiries were made regarding the Bashkirtseffs the result was not satisfactory. The rumours that hung round them on the Riviera had come with them to Rome. Even the fact of Marie’s spectacular bed—that fatal bed left standing on its eagle’s claws in her room at Nice—even this was known to the gossips of Rome, exclaimed at and condemned. Yes, decided Rome, there was too much the air of adventurers about these Bashkirtseffs.

A friend of Madame Bashkirtseff, Monsieur Visconti, was one day talking to her, and after feeling his way by a little tactful praising of Antonelli, remarked: ‘The question is, Madame, where you want to marry your daughter?’

‘I have no fixed idea . . . my daughter is so young.’

‘No, Madame, the question must be faced. Do you want to marry her abroad or in Russia?’

‘I’d rather abroad, for I think she’d be happier abroad because of her having been brought up there.’

‘Very well, it remains to be seen if all your family would consent to see her married to a Catholic, and the children born of this union brought up in the Catholic faith.’

'Our family would be pleased at anything that would make my daughter happy.'

'And how do you think your family would get on with the husband's?'

'I think excellently, especially as the two families would see each other only rarely or not at all.'

'Peter Antonelli,' went on Visconti, 'is a charming young man and will be very well off, but the Pope is mixed up in everything to do with the Antonellis, and the Pope will make difficulties.'

Madame Bashkirtseff saw it was time to draw back. 'But, Monsieur, why do you say all this? There's no question of marriage. I like this young man as a son . . . not as a future son-in-law.' The conversation came to an end; but it had left a shadow.

In spite of what she had said, Madame Bashkirtseff would very much have liked the Cardinalino as a son-in-law. But Antonelli's family had no wish to welcome Marie as a daughter-in-law, and the fonder they saw Pietro becoming, the more determined they were that he should not marry her. It is noticeable that often as he was to be found now in the Bashkirtseffs' drawing-room his family was never seen there. Disapproving and silent they remained aloof.

As for Marie, her mind was a tornado of conflicting emotions. Antonelli charmed her to the extent that she was ready to marry him, but with the realization of her own feelings came equally the realization of difficulties. There was his family: also there was the doubt in her mind as to whether Antonelli really cared for her enough to want to marry her. Stung with humiliation at these considerations she would seize her pen and try to soothe herself by dashing off a phrase in the true Bashkirtseffian grand manner. 'Naturally the idea that they want to take Pietro from me puts me in a fury, but I see better things for myself, and aspire higher, thank God.'

And then Antonelli would come lounging into the room in his curiously indecisive way, and yet with that something about him that made her feel that merely to be with him was all she asked. One day he produced a pack of cards and asked her to play. Plowden happened to be there, and said he would play too.

'But it can't be done!' cried Antonelli, opening his eyes very wide.

'Yes, yes, yes,' said Marie, '... we can play three, it's the same thing.'

'The same thing!'" said Antonelli, looking at me as if I'd pricked him with a pin. Even in writing it, his voice is in my ears.... When he goes, I'm annoyed, I never have enough.  
...

The two would get involved in exquisitely entangling conversations: Antonelli's efforts at describing his feelings splintered by Marie's laughter, for, not knowing how sincere he was, she hid her own feelings as much as she could.

'Eternal love,' he explained to her, 'is the tomb of love... one must love for a day, then change.'

'Charming idea! Has your Cardinal uncle taught you that?'

'Yes,' said Antonelli laughing.

'Let's marry,' Antonelli suggested another time, 'we've a superb future in front of us.'

'Yes, if I'd agree,' fenced Marie. Often now he had told her he loved her, and as often she had replied, 'It's not true!' Did he love her, or did he not? How much did he mean what he said? And if he did mean it, would his watchful family allow him to marry? How hateful it was that this good thing that had come to her should be so tarnished with doubt and uncertainty.

It was possibly in the hope of making a greater impression on Roman society that the Bashkirtseffs in the middle of March moved into bigger rooms in an hotel in *la via Babuino*. They had an ante-room, then a small drawing-room, and then a large one. In this room was a piano, and at it Marie would sit and play Mendelssohn, and Antonelli coming in would, after a few words with Madame Bashkirtseff and the others, stroll over to her and begin to sing. Or sometimes they would ride together on the Campagna, Marie extremely attractive in a riding habit à *la Amazone* and high boots embroidered with the Bashkirtseff arms.

Here we see them on one of these rides. The Campagna lies stretched out in that hour of early evening when the low light illumines everything with curious intensity; when each

smallest object, each blade of grass, stands out in soft radiant clarity; a moment when nature, intimate and serene, seems to draw closer to man.

Through this tranquil glow a carriage is driving: within it sit Madame Bashkirtseff and Dina, their eyes on the two riders a little way off.

'You know,' Antonelli is saying 'I have never loved anyone, my one affection was for my mother, as for the rest . . . I never looked at anyone at the theatre, I never went to the Pincio . . . I used to make fun of everyone, and now I go there.'

'For me?'

'For you. I'm forced to. . . .'

In this wide sea of air how exquisitely on the ear impinges the smallest sound—the low creak of saddle; the muted thud of hoof on turf; the distant churn of carriage-wheel.

'I often think of you in the evening,' goes on Antonelli.

'At your club, possibly?'

'Yes, at the club. When night comes I stay there and dream, I smoke and I think of you . . . especially when it gets dark, when I'm alone . . . I reach such a state of illusionment that I imagine you are there. . . . I assure you I've never felt what I feel now, so I conclude this is love . . . that I am in love.'

'How old are you?'

'Twenty-three . . . if you realize, sometimes . . . I have so much to say and, and. . . .'

'And you can't say it?'

'No, not that exactly; I feel in love and idiotic.'

'Don't think that, you're not the least idiotic.'

Antonelli turned towards her: 'You don't love me.'

'I know you so little that really it's impossible to say.'

'But when you know me better . . . perhaps you'll love me a little?' His voice had dropped very low and, to her surprise, Marie noticed a timidity had crept into his eyes. At once she too became sincere.

'Perhaps' she said gently.

'You always look charming,' said Antonelli towards the end of their ride, 'I don't know how you manage it.'

'My hair's dreadfully untidy.'

'So much the better, untidy like that you're still more . . . you're . . .' He stopped and smiled. 'You're still more, I don't know how to put it . . . more exciting.'

Over the Campagna the light had all but gone: they rejoined the others, and Marie got into the carriage.

Once home and back in her room she stripped off her habit and put on a dressing-gown. Her head whirled. She wanted to remember and write down every single word that had passed between her and Antonelli, record every change that had passed within those chestnut irises; but for two hours her mind was in such commotion that she could do nothing but lie on her back and try and regain her balance: 'You see, good people, I am . . . quite overcome.' Surely seldom, if ever, had there been such a conversation between a man and a girl, one so full of import, so packed with interest—the world must not miss a word of it. At last, getting up from the sofa, she seized her pen, and with all the enthusiasm of her fifteen years she sat and wrote and wrote.

## 4

However much Antonelli at present filled Marie's thoughts he never for a moment usurped the place that the Duke had held, and still held, in her mind. The Duke had been to her a god, a religion, he had become part of the fibre of her being. Antonelli was a delight, an excitement: when together, their spirits danced a fandango of gaiety: but whether she was actually in love with him or not—to decide that was beyond even her scrupulous self-analysis. 'I love him and I do not love him.' Yes, that was about the nearest she could get. But while she was thoughtfully weighing her feelings, Antonelli's family were plotting to put a stop to any further developments between these two. For to say the truth this seductive young man with his conquering airs was not nearly as much his own master as he would have liked. The past laid its hand on him in the shape of debts; the future in his dependence on what his relatives would leave him. In appearance his string of liberty was long, but if his parents gave it a

pull, back he had to go. Of the pull they were giving to it now, Marie became more and more aware. In her diary she tried to soothe herself by putting the situation in a slightly different light to that in which it really stood.

'Really it's not very pleasant that they should make difficulties about accepting me when I myself don't want to accept them . . . and they dare to say that the Pope will not allow it! . . . Let us leave Rome.' Yes, it had come to that: if it was going to be the Nice ostracism over again, then better go . . . escape before the worst arrived.

And, meanwhile, his family's opposition, the fear that they really were going to step between him and Marie, was making Antonelli realize how much she now meant to him. 'I love you . . . I'd do anything for you,' he assured her.

'The Pope will curse you, the Cardinal will curse you, and your father will curse you.'

'A lot I care for all these people when it's a question of you! . . . If you loved me in the way I do you . . . you'd see nothing in the whole world but the man who loves you.'

But when Marie had said 'Come to Nice', he had hung his head and said nothing; 'which shows me,' writes Marie, 'that he's spoken to his father.' In fact the situation seemed hopelessly involved. Marie tried to reason it out in her diary. 'For several days now I've been in a false position, and why is it false? Because Pietro has asked me to be his wife; because I haven't actually refused: because he's spoken about it to his parents; because his parents are not easy to manage. . . .'

And it was not long before these parents made a definite move. One evening at the end of March, Antonelli came in and found Marie, her mother, and Dina sitting together. After a few moments he remarked, 'To-morrow I'm going away.'

'Where to?'

'To Terracina. I shall be there, I think, for a week.'

'They're sending him away,' said Madame Bashkirtseff in Russian in a low aside to Marie. 'Yes, most disagreeable,' Marie murmured back. There came a pause. Madame Bashkirtseff already had a headache, and this proof of the Antonelli family's hostility made her 'so offended, so furious' that she got up and left the room. Dina had already slipped out. Marie,

left alone with Antonelli, turned on him and demanded bluntly, 'Why are you going? Where are you going?'

Antonelli became evasive. 'What is your motto? . . .' he asked.

'Nothing before me, nothing after me, nothing but me.'

'Good, that's mine too!' And then, surprisingly, he burst out into complaints saying that much as he loved her he could feel no reliance that she on her side cared for him, as not only did she tease him, laugh at him, but—what he minded far more—coldly passed judgment on his behaviour. 'What can I say,' he remarked finally, 'when I see that you will never care for me?' And in Antonelli's indignation another feature in their relationship comes to light, one that was perhaps really the fundamental cause of what was to follow. Antonelli's occupation in life was the pursuit of pleasure: it had proved expensive, hence his debts—but what of that? Like everyone else he had a comfortably good opinion of himself: added to his undoubted charms he saw Pietro Antonelli as an estimable character: subconsciously, wherever he went, he carried this pleasing little picture about with him. Marie, on the contrary, accustomed to spare no one with her criticisms, had not spared Antonelli. She had, in fact, held up to him a picture of himself the opposite to his own: and the contrast rankled. She did not take his annoyance seriously: it was, she thought, merely a passing petulance; but in this she was wrong. Antonelli had come to-day, for instance, with something special to tell her, but so much did he dread being jeered at that it was a long time before she could persuade him to tell her what it was.

'But you'll only make fun of me . . .' he protested 'it's a great secret. There are things that are so private that one doesn't tell them to anyone in the world.'

'Tell me, I'm waiting.'

'I'll tell you, but you'll make fun of me.'

'I swear to you I won't.'

After further promises that she would neither laugh nor repeat what he said, he did finally tell her. His father had consented to pay off his debts if he, on his side, would from now on lead a reasonable life, and as assurance of this spend a

week in a monastery. Unlike Antonelli, Marie had not been accustomed as a child to eat, when ill, yards of a strip of paper on which 'Marie' was repetitively printed, neither had she been brought up under priestly surveillance; therefore that her lover should retire for a week behind the grille, which to Antonelli seemed perfectly normal, to her seemed ludicrous. 'I assure you I had trouble enough to remain serious . . . I leant against the mantelpiece and a chair, turning away my eyes which were, the devil knows why, full of tears. He leant by my side and we stayed several seconds without speaking or looking at each other.' But if he did not look, Antonelli's senses were well aware of this proximity, and in a moment or two, all his annoyance forgotten, he was saying 'very low and very quickly . . . I love you, I adore you, I'm mad about you. . . . Do you love me a little? tell me!'

'And if I do love you, what good will it do?'

'By Jove—it will make us happy.'

'I can't decide by myself . . . there are fathers and mothers.'

'Mine . . . have nothing against you, that I can guarantee. Let's get engaged!'

'Not so quick. What have you said to your mother? . . . ?'

To and fro between them continued feint and parry. 'You can be certain,' Antonelli assured her, 'that my parents have nothing against you: there's only the question of religion.'

'I know perfectly well they can have nothing against me,' retorted Marie, 'for if I consented to marry you, it would be you who would be honoured and not I.' A kind of observation which is a mistake.

So Antonelli went into his monastery, and Marie was left to commit her annoyance and her boredom to her diary. 'I have taken refuge in my diary begging it to soothe my heart—empty, sad . . . envious, unhappy. Yes, and I with all my tendencies, my immense desires and fever for life, always and everywhere I am pulled up like a horse is pulled up by the bit. It foams, rages, prances, but it is pulled up. . . .'

Her mother held out to her a philosophical tag to the effect that one has only to regard what happens to one in a certain light to discover that nothing in this world is worth worrying about. True, no doubt, but somehow this consideration did not

#### A BALCONY IN ROME

make things any better. 'I feel tormented' Marie wrote the next day. 'Oh! how true is the Russian expression "To have a cat in one's heart!" I have got a cat in my heart.' There was reason for this depression, for the day she wrote this was the 7th of April, the day Antonelli was to leave the monastery, and he had not come to see them. Certainly he was not leaving till the evening, but all the same. . . .

The days passed and passed, and still he did not come. 'But as I don't love him! I want to be reasonable, calm, and I cannot. . . . There's nothing more dreadful than not being able to pray. Prayer is the only consolation for those who can't act. I do pray, but I have no faith. It's abominable.'

On the 12th they went to Naples. Marie hated going and hated it when she got there. After a day or so of sunshine the weather turned bad. Their hotel was depressing. It was one of those moments in life when everything seems, quite suddenly, to be enwrapped in unbearable dreariness. 'Dull weather always makes me a little sad, but to-day it is oppressing. This silence of death in our hotel room, this irritating noise outside of flys and carts, this grey sky, this wind that shakes the curtains. . . .'

By the 24th they were back again in Rome. On the Corso they saw Antonelli. He ran up to their carriage radiant with pleasure, and asked if they would be at home that evening. He came, he explained, he made love: but it was love of a halting and far from satisfactory kind. He had, he told Marie, been four days at the monastery, then in the country. It was odd, but he seemed to her almost as if he were someone else. 'He is quite changed, it's as if in three weeks he has become a man of thirty. He talks quite differently. . . .' Yes, much too differently. Where was all that tenderness and enthusiasm of only a few weeks back? What seemed chiefly to fill his mind were the good terms now existing between him and his family. But after talking of all kinds of things he did at last say 'You love me?'

'And what about you?'

'Ah, there you are, always making fun of me!'

'And what if I told you I did! . . .' To the reader this pat ball becomes wearisome.

'It seems to me he doesn't love me any more,' wrote Marie in her diary. It was hideous to have to allow it, but hideous or not she was afraid it was true.

The next evening he came again. It was the era when the round table petticoated with a table-cloth, and albums arranged in a circle on top, dominated the drawing-room. This evening the Bashkirtseffs and some friends were clustered about one of these tables, but when Antonelli appeared, he and Marie went off together and sat at another. Antonelli was as bewildering as ever: at one moment, writes Marie, he spoke 'so lightly of his love for me that I don't know what to think,' and yet, a few moments later, he was practically saying that he considered himself and her as engaged.

Two days later the Bashkirtseffs left Rome for Nice. There had been one more interview with Antonelli in which he had given vent to his annoyance at all the aspersions Marie had at different times let fly at him: 'You have always treated me as a scoundrel,' he complained. 'If in my life I have committed follies, so does everyone, that's no reason why I should be looked on as a scapegrace.' These hostile criticisms had been serious wounds to his self-esteem, but though Marie wrote down his annoyance in her diary she did not the least realize its import.

'You'll write to me?' was one of his last questions.

'No . . . I can't, but I'll allow you to write to me!'

'Oh! oh! a nice kind of love!'

## 5

On the platform at Nice Aunt Sophie and several friends were waiting for the train from Rome. Mademoiselle Colignon, the once dismissed governess, was with them, for in some capacity or other she was now back in the Bashkirtseff household. The train came roaring in. Their eyes raked the carriages—there they were! Marie thrust her head out of the window. 'You realize,' she called out, 'I'm furious at coming back but I couldn't help it.' After which tactful greeting she got down from the train, and kissed everyone in turn.

#### A BALCONY IN ROME

The air of spring lay over Nice. Marie would wander about the garden lit by a young moon, listening to the minute chirpings of the frogs. It is hardly necessary to say of what or of whom she thought continuously. One thing was certain: she must go back to Rome, and soon. Her mother agreed, and it was settled that in about ten days time Marie and Aunt Sophie should return there together.

In the meantime, Marie decided to give a party; not to the disdainful who formed Nice society but to the poor. It was an old custom of the town during the first days of May to hang up garlands of flowers among lighted lanterns, and then to dance and sing beneath. But this custom was dying out; in the whole town now only three or four wreaths would be seen. But Marie made up her mind that on May the 6th the Niçois should have garlands and lanterns in abundance.

On the evening of that day there was to be seen, high up across the street by the side of the Bashkirtseffs' house, a great outstretched mass of flowers and leaves with Venetian lamps glistening among them. The valet, Triphon, ensconced on the garden wall, was to let off fireworks: while down below, wine stood ready for the guests. There was no balcony on the street side of the Bashkirtseffs' house, so Marie, Dina, and Olga Sopogenikoff used a ladder put up against the garden wall, and clinging to this they watched the dancing, and sometimes clambered down, descending like gay young angels from their celestial palace above to increase the gaiety of the more earthly beings capering, laughing, and singing below. To-night any workman or fisherman who wished could dance with Marie or Dina, for a few moments hold in his arms, whirl and twirl these porcelain creatures. As the good Niçois danced they sang, and Marie sang with them. What a night of enchantment it was! Against the slow plunge of the sea sounded the leaping wail of violin, the plucked strings of harp, the airy flutterings of flute. Then the sudden fizz of a firework—a long pencil of light rushing upwards into the sky, a soundless burst, and then a shower of languid-falling stars. And then again the slow plunge of sea, the music of violin, of harp, of flute. Wine, and whirling dust, and happy consciousness of sex: in the splattered light

beneath the canopy of flowers faces appearing and disappearing, now illumined with moonlight or the sudden glare of Bengal fire, now shadowed, lost in satyr darkness.

It was an evening that nothing marred: a joyous marriage of riches and poverty cradled in the soft immensity of a May night.

Antonelli had made no use of Marie's gracious permission to write to her, and she was in consequence annoyed. Evidently he was a most despicable character. 'To-morrow,' she wrote on the 7th of May, 'I go to Rome, as much to amuse myself as to scorn Antonelli.' Hardly the spirit in which to encourage a laggard lover! But Marie's outlook was in everything that of the egoist. Four days later comes the entry: 'At two o'clock we were at Rome, I threw myself into a fly, my aunt followed, the conductor . . . took the tickets and . . . and . . . I was at Rome! *Dieu!* What happiness! . . .'

Everyone was at an agricultural show at the *Villa Borghese*, so there too went Marie and Aunt Sophie. While they were gazing at the flowers and the vegetables Marie saw Antonelli and beckoned to him to come up. He chattered away in the highest spirits saying that actually he had been in the monastery two and a half weeks: he had meant to be there for four days only but they would not let him go. 'Then why did you tell a lie,' demanded Marie. 'Why did you say you'd been at Terracina?'

'Because I was ashamed to tell the truth.'

'And do your friends at the Club know?'

'Yes. To start with I told them I'd been at Terracina, then they talked to me about the monastery, and I ended by telling them everything, and I laughed, and everyone laughed.'

He told her too that, to impress his father, he would occasionally let fall from his pocket a rosary, so as to make him think he always carried it about with him. Marie, true to her policy, derided him mercilessly. 'He made very good replies, ma foi!' she writes. He might make good replies, but inwardly he winced. This teasing derision chilled him, dried up all his warmth of feeling for her, and the effect on him was easy enough to see when a few days later he and Marie met again. He informed her that she was made of ice, that he should go

to America, that he loved her when he saw her but, once away, he forgot her.

These were terrible words to have to record in the diary, but Marie did not flinch: 'And as I write I hear the sound my tears make falling on the paper.'

Then comes their last meeting before Marie and Aunt Sophie went back to Nice.

*'Friday, May 19th. My aunt has gone to the Vatican, and I, not being able to be with Pietro, prefer to be alone. He is coming about five o'clock, I do so hope my aunt will still be out. I should like to be found alone, as if by chance, for I can't let it be seen any more that I'm on the look-out for him ...'*

'My aunt came back at four o'clock, and at the end of twenty-five minutes I had artfully induced her to go and see the church of Santa Maria Maggiore. It is half-past four. I made a mistake, she ought to have been sent off at five, for I'm very much afraid she'll still come back too soon.' However, before long the door opened and the servant announced, 'Count Antonelli.' 'He sat down close to me and started by taking my hand which I at once drew away. Then he told me he loved me. I rejected this by smiling politely.'

'Have patience,' Marie said, 'my aunt will be back in a minute.'

'I've such a lot to tell you!'

'Really!'

'But your aunt is coming back.'

'Then hurry up.'

'They are serious things.'

'Let's hear them . . .'

'Listen, I've spoken to my mother, and she has spoken to my father.'

'Well . . . ?'

'I did well, didn't I?'

'It's nothing to do with me, what you've done, you've done for yourself.'

'You don't love me?'

'No.'

'And I love you like a lunatic.'

'So much the worse for you. . . .'

'No, listen . . . let's talk seriously, you are never serious. I love you! I've spoken to my mother . . . Be my wife.'

Marie reminded him of the question of religion, saying that her father and grandfather would be against her marrying a Catholic.

'Ah! there's still that,' exclaimed the young man.

'Yes, there's still that.'

Antonelli got up, and taking her by the arm led her to a looking-glass. The thin, brown-faced young man, and the pink-white girl with her crown of hair stood side by side looking at their reflection. 'Like this,' says Marie solemnly, 'we were very beautiful.' And probably she was right.

'How young we are to marry,' exclaimed Antonelli, 'do you think we shall be happy?'

'My consent is necessary first.'

'Of course. Then . . . if you consent, shall we be happy?'

'If I consent, I swear to you on my head there won't be a happier man in the world than you.'

'Then we will marry. Be my wife.'

Marie smiled. Antonelli began bounding about the room. 'Oh!' he cried, 'how happy I shall be, how funny it will be when we have children.'

The sounds of voices reached them from the stairs, and in a moment Aunt Sophie came in. Antonelli stayed on and on, and finally, when it had become dark, he and Marie and her aunt, taking a candle with them, wandered through all the empty rooms of the hotel. It had originally been a palace, and remnants of grandiose beauty still clung to it. Antonelli's insistence on marriage had raised Marie's spirits sky-high, and they had a delicious evening, all laughter and nonsense. Antonelli was mad with gaiety, and when they arrived in a large drawing room all trimmed in yellow he began taking off first his Cardinal uncle, then his father, then his brother. Aunt Sophie, warming to the general hilarity, began writing down absurdities in Russian for Antonelli to translate. The idea came to Marie how delightful it would be, before she left Rome the next day, to have a further private talk with Antonelli. Taking a book she scribbled on the front page 'Go away at

midnight. I will talk to you down below', and held the book out to him.

'Do you understand?' she asked, rubbing out what she had written.

'Yes.'

So far in her life this was the most exciting moment she had experienced, she felt 'oddly agitated', and every time Antonelli glanced at the clock she thought her aunt would guess the reason. Punctually at midnight he got up and said good-bye. Marie, with her usual high handedness, easily disposed of Aunt Sophie by locking her into her bedroom, saying she, Marie, wished to write her diary undisturbed. She felt, so she tells us, the evening was becoming every moment more and more like a page from Dumas. She went to her bedroom, glanced at herself in the glass, and then went down the staircase. As she reached the foot a gliding shadow materialized as Antonelli. Marie pushed to a door, and she and Pietro became cloaked in a mere glimmer of light. She sat on the bottom step, he knelt by her and they embarked on one of their usual staccato conversations.

'First of all,' said Antonelli, 'what can we do when you're going away to-morrow. Don't go, I implore you, don't go!'

'It's impossible, my aunt. . . .'

'She's so kind! Oh, do stay on.'

'She is kind, but she wouldn't agree to that. So, adieu . . . perhaps for always!'

'No, no, you have agreed to be my wife.'

'When?'

From outside came the sound of rain—tap, tap, now a drip, and now a trickle. In her strung-up condition Marie had become nervous at the least sound. 'It's nothing,' Antonelli reassured her, and their low voices murmured on.

'We will buy a small house in the new quarter,' said Antonelli.

'I should prefer a big one.'

'Very well, a big one.'

They continued to whisper . . . but a voice, the voice of Aunt Sophie from behind her locked door reached them. 'Marie! Marie!'

Up the stairs Marie hurried so that her voice should seem to

be coming from her own room. ‘What’s the matter?’ she demanded.

‘It’s two o’clock you must go to sleep. . . . ’

‘I am asleep.’

‘You are undressed?’

‘Yes. . . . ’

‘Go to bed.’

‘Yes, yes.’

Down she went again. What fun it all was! To those who read of it, a mere schoolgirl escapade; to her, a Dumasesque evening pulsating with import. She told Antonelli it was time for her to go. ‘Already?’ Wait a moment longer, close to me . . . Oh! *ma chérie*, how I wish it was impossible for us to leave this place.’ Did he mean what he said? Always there was this trepidation in her mind that he did not.

There was a vague outcome to their two hours’ talk on the stairs: it was more or less agreed that they should marry in two years’ time. They kissed and parted. Marie fled up the stairs. ‘It’s four o’clock,’ called out Aunt Sophie.

‘In the first place, my aunt, it’s only ten past two, and further . . . leave me in peace.’ She undressed, then went to her aunt’s room and unlocked the door.

‘Listen,’ she said as she went in, ‘Don’t scold me or I’ll tell you nothing.’

‘The devil! . . . ’ a little surprisingly exclaimed Aunt Sophie.

‘First of all,’ remarked Marie, ‘I haven’t been writing, I’ve been with Pietro.’

‘Where, you wretch!’

‘Down below.’

‘How dreadful!’

‘Oh, if you scream, you shall hear nothing.’

‘You were with Antonelli?’

‘Yes.’

Aunt Sophie’s voice took on a curious tone. ‘Well,’ she said, ‘I knew all about it when I called you just now.’

‘How?’

‘I dreamt that Mama came to me and said: “Don’t leave Marie alone with Antonelli.” ’

Aunt and niece confronted each other: this perspicacity on

the part of Madame Bashkirtseff asleep in her bed at Nice was decidedly disconcerting. Marie began to see her escapade in a different light. A little sobered she went off to bed.

The next day she and Aunt Sophie left for Nice: and as the train, gathering impetus, rushed into the country, the impalpable tissue of gaiety and youth and laughter woven by Marie and Antonelli and joining each to the other, was stretched, strained, torn across . . . and vanished like the blown vapour from the engine.

## 6

Back in Nice Marie started anew on her work of self-education; but however closely she packed her days the distant, the silent Antonelli occupied her mind. She turned from La Rochefoucauld to Horace, from Horace to Tibullus, she assured herself that work was the panacea for everything—but it was no use. Always, like a ball on a string, her mind jerked back to Pietro. ‘How,’ she would ask herself, ‘How can one love a man who is brown, ugly, very thin . . . after a man like the Duke?’ But run him down as she might, compare him contemptuously with Hamilton, assure herself she did not love him, all the same this despised creature at Rome gave her no peace. Why did he not write? Why did he not come to Nice? ‘Heavens! Explain to me what sort of man this is, and what sort of love?’ To the onlooker it is not difficult to explain. When she was close to Antonelli, when he glanced at that little neat nose over which the skin fitted so smoothly, at that piled-up, gleaming hair—hair that looked as if at a touch it would fall warm and soft as feathers over the venturing hand—at these moments he loved her. And when she was not there, and, instead of her living presence, he had only the memory of her chilling retorts to his eagerness, her tart comments on his character, then he loved her very little.

But Marie, fidgeting about her rooms at Nice, had no clue to Antonelli’s vagaries; her fifteen years did not hold enough experience to act as compass. And added to her longing for her carnival lover was the humiliation of her position. ‘Count Antonelli asked her to marry him, but there was opposition;

he changed his mind and drew back'—that was the phrase that haunted her. This must be what people were thinking, this what they said. Everyone at Rome knew of the affair, had talked of it, discussed it: and inevitably during these discussions contemptuous things must have been said of her and her family. The thought of it was like a knife in her pride. 'There is nothing like an occupied mind: work overcomes everything, especially mental work.' So she assured herself, and she would pick up a Latin and French translation of Confucius—'a very interesting work' . . . but Confucius and his subtleties could not save her, back into her mind inevitably, insidiously, would come creeping that loathsome phrase, 'Count Antonelli asked her to marry him, but. . . .'

Outside the house in which lived this fretted spirit the spring days, serene and indifferent, quietly succeeded each other. Coming back one Sunday from a walk, Marie went over to the window. How strange it was . . . the whole episode of Rome, all that excitement and exaltation of spirit—it had come, it had gone, and now, looking out of the window into this familiar Sunday tranquillity, it was all as if it had never been! 'It's fantastic, nothing seems changed, it's as if it were last year.' From outside there rose to her ear a mingling of gentlest sounds: 'Never have the melodies of Nice seemed to me so charming' . . . and as she tells us of them we too seem to stand at her window, to feel the sun-warmed sill beneath our hands, and to hear that subtle interweave of burble of fountain, cry of frogs, low swish of sea, and, far away in the Sunday stillness, a voice singing . . . and then, cutting across this delicate web of sound, the relentless *clip-clop, rundle-grundle* of a passing brougham—*clip-clop, clip-clop*—but now it is going further and further away along the promenade, taking its horrid disturbance with it—*clip, clop* . . . fainter . . . further . . . fainter . . . the torn silence closes together again, and within it the tender web of sound reweaves itself. . . .

As the days passed and no word or sign came from Rome, Marie became sunk in depression. This depression impregnates her diary, but outwardly she kept up a great show of happiness. 'Here,' she writes, 'my inner side is seen. Out-

wardly I'm quite different. Anyone would think I hadn't a single worry. . . . It is curious how, in our own time, cheerfulness is looked on no longer as a virtue but as a right. In this the people of the 'seventies showed more acumen, and though Marie's acted air of gaiety certainly sprang a good deal from pride there was courage mixed with it.

'This evening,' she writes one day, 'I love him. Should I do well to accept him? As long as there is love, all will be well, but afterwards? I'm much afraid that mediocrity would make me hang myself with rage! I reason and discuss as if I were mistress of the situation. Ah, misery of miseries. . . .'

'Wait! Wait for what?

'And if nothing comes? Bah! with my face I shall find it—and the proof . . . that I'm barely sixteen, and that I could already have become a countess two and a half times. I say half for Pietro.' Two men, so it seems, for whom Marie cared nothing and of whom we know nothing, had already made her conventional offers of marriage.

Reading, or writing in her diary, she would sit up long after the rest of the family had gone to bed. 'You know,' she said one Sunday to Walitsky 'that I'm spitting blood and that I ought to be looked after.'

'Oh! Mademoiselle,' expostulated the doctor, 'if you never go to bed till three o'clock in the morning you'll have every illness.'

'And why d'you think I go to bed so late? because I've no peace of mind. Give me peace of mind and I'll sleep peacefully.'

'You could have had it. You had the opportunity at Rome.'

'Who with?'

'With Antonelli, by marrying without changing your religion.'

'Oh! my friend Walitsky, how horrible! With a man like Antonelli! think of what you're saying! A man without opinions or will power, what a stupid thing to say! Oh, really!' Here she managed a slight laugh. 'He doesn't come,' she went on, 'he doesn't write . . . he's a worthless creature whose importance we exaggerated. No, my dear, he's not a man and we made a mistake in thinking otherwise.'

Bluff was all very well: in the circumstances it was the best she



And then, suddenly, the absent, the silent Antonelli spoke.

One morning in June as Marie sat reading, waiting for her family to call her to breakfast, Walitsky came into the room 'breathless', saying that a letter had just come from Antonelli. 'I went very red,' writes Marie, 'and without raising my eyes from the book I was reading—"Well, what does he say?"' I was very careful' she adds, 'not to be hurried in asking this. I was ashamed to show so much interest.'

'They won't give him any money,' said Walitsky: 'more than that I don't know,' meaning he could not read Italian.

'Unlike usually,' says Marie, 'I was the first at table, eating . . . with impatience but saying nothing.' But at last she could contain herself no longer.

'Is what the doctor says true?'

'Yes,' said Aunt Sophie, 'Antonelli has written to him.'

'Doctor, where is the letter?'

'In my room.'

'Let me have it.' He fetched it, and gave it her. She began to read. 'All this time I've been asking my parents to let me come . . .' wrote Antonelli: 'they absolutely won't hear of it.' He ended by saying that all that remained was hope for the future, that future being of necessity 'uncertain'. The letter being in Italian, her family were expectantly waiting for her to give them a translation. They did not get it. 'I did not say a word,' continues Marie, 'but, picking up my train with affected slowness so that they should not think I was rushing away suffocated, I went out of the room and across the garden.' At one touch her imagined future with Antonelli had fallen to pieces. As far as that was concerned all was over, completely, absolutely. Bereft of him, life, for the moment, seemed a complete blank. It was unbearable! Quick! Somehow, in one way or another she must refill this blank, construct some sort of plan for the future—but what plan? What course could she take? What do? 'Die? God does not wish it. Become a singer? I have neither the health nor the patience. Then what, what? I threw myself into an armchair and, my eyes staring stupidly at nothing, tried to understand the letter, to think of something. . . .' But a voice reached her from the garden.

## FOUNTAINS OF YOUTH

'Would you like to go to the somnambulist?' called out her mother.

'Yes,' called Marie, 'when?'

'This very moment.'

'Anything . . . not to remain alone.' They drove off together, found the somnambulist out, and drove home again in the gathering heat of the morning. 'Slowly . . . I walked straight to my bed and lay down, stiff as a poker, drawing the lace curtains round me. . . . There comes a moment when one does not know how to express one's unhappiness.'

And within this frail barrier of lace that separated her from the world which had dealt her this buffet she lay and suffered.

### 7

The hostility of Antonelli's family had brought another pressure to bear on Marie. It had made her realize how necessary it was, if they wished to make a good impression on the world that the head of her family should live with them. Very well then, it must be seen to that this desirable readjustment took place. Someone must go to Russia, explain the situation to the far too light-hearted, far too easy-going Constantin, make him realize his duties both as husband and father, effect on him a complete change of heart, and then, this part of the programme accomplished, bring him, a regenerate character, back to Nice to preside over the disorders of his wife's housekeeping and his daughter's amatory ventures. It was obviously too delicate a mission to entrust to any member of her family, therefore she, Marie, must undertake it herself. And so it was decided. Aunt Sophie would chaperon her to the door of Russia, and there some other members of the family would meet her.

Idling about his charming property, arranging this summer for the repainting of his house, letting off in his tenser moments his nine cannon, Constantin received the news of his daughter's intended visit. What the reactions of his mind, how much he guessed what was the mission of this family ambassadress, we do not know. It is not the first time that we wish that Constantin too had kept a diary.

Marie and her aunt were to set off at the beginning of July, and therefore, after the arrival of Antonelli's letter, only a few days remained before they would say good-bye to Nice. In lassitude both from overwhelmingly hot weather and from the sense of personal failure, Marie set about making preparations for her journey. Sheets of music were piled up: books were put together in clumps—Plato, Dante, and Shakespeare were to companion her, and too a whole collection of English novels by Bulwer Lytton, Collins, and Dickens. One thing saddened her: the thought of being parted for months from the early parts of her diary. 'This poor diary that contains all my aspirations . . . all my transports that will be looked on as the transports of an imprisoned genius if the end is crowned with success and . . . as the delirious vanity of a banal creature if I vegetate eternally.'

'Marry and have children!' she continues, 'but every laundress can do as much. At least find a man who is enlightened and civilized, or weak and very much in love.'

'But what is it I want? Oh, you know perfectly! I want fame! It is not this diary that will give it me. It won't be published till after my death, for in it I'm *too naked* to expose myself while I'm alive. Furthermore, it would only be the complement of a brilliant life. A brilliant life! Folly that is the result of isolation, reading history, and a too lively imagination! . . . Here is the end of this copy-book! Arrived in Paris I shall start another that no doubt will last me for Russia. . . . I shall take Pietro's last letter with me.'

Her packing went on, and there came the last evening. 'I made several impertinent remarks to my aunt, then I went out on my terrace.' The burning heat of day had dwindled, and in the evening stillness the garden lay waiting for the dark wash of night. Musing and dejected, sad too now at the thought of leaving Nice, she wandered along beneath the trees, by the palms and the bamboos, lingered by a vase where a canna upreared its loveliness, drifted on to a grotto where the water, falling drop by drop, softly tapped the silence. As she wandered, imperceptibly the dusk thickened. Gradually all the garden colours became muted: flower petals palely glimmered, from dimness into dimness moths flew.

At last she went indoors, up to her own room, and pulled the white box in which she kept her diary close to the table. ‘Ah! here is my chief regret!... My diary!... it is half of myself. Each day I used to turn over the leaves of my copy-books according to whether I wished to bring back to my mind Rome or Nice or things still further back!’ But, happening to look up, she received a shock of pleasure. ‘As if on purpose the evening of my departure the moon shone pallid and brilliant illumining all the beauties of my town. *Mine?* Without doubt, *my town!* I am too unimportant for anyone to want to dispute my ownership.’ Leaving her own room, she went into the drawing room where, through windows left wide open to the warm night, the moonlight poured; the white walls, the white covered chairs, the whole room, were sculptured in moonlight. A curious sense of well-being, almost of exaltation, invaded her as she wandered about the room, wrapped in this cloak of phosphorescent light. ‘I felt I wanted nothing. I should always like to feel so peaceful ... in this sense of calm well-being, my spirit expanded, seemed to wish to diffuse itself on everything round me.’ It was one of those rare moments when the ordinary values of life undergo a change, when the antennæ of the spirit just touch some subtler state of consciousness in which all loss is turned to gain, in which, from past griefs, as from trodden herbs, only fragrance uprises. And even if her thoughts did turn again to her immediate problems, surely her life still held elements of every kind of hope; after all, how young she still was: if the past had not given her what she had asked there was all her future in front of her. Much might come of this journey to Russia, she was turning her back on the old, and going out to meet the new. ‘I go to Russia to change our life.’ That was her slogan, her challenge.

Dipped in this white moonlight how profoundly, how exquisitely still everything was ... through the windows the sound of the sea came so softly it might have been merely the Tritons emptying their water-filled conches on to the shore.

On their way to Russia Marie and Aunt Sophie stayed for two or three weeks in Paris. While there they took part in two curious episodes, both of which have the true Bashkirtseffian flavour. One evening when they had gone to see a friend, referred to as la Comtesse de M . . . , Marie confided in her her great wish to become a singer. 'This, dear Comtesse,' said Marie, 'is what we must do. I will disguise myself as a poor girl, and you with my aunt shall take me to the best singing master in Paris, as if I were a little Italian girl you are patronizing who gives promise of having a voice.'

'Oh! oh!' said her dear Comtesse. However, ultimately she agreed, and the next afternoon they all three set off to interview Monsieur Wartel, Marie demurely dressed in grey with black lace fichu and maroon-coloured hat. She was extremely dry in the throat, having swallowed a quantity of salt which she believed to be good for the voice. The appointment was for four o'clock, but having arrived at three they had to wait an hour. At last from an adjoining room Wartel called out, 'Come in, Mademoiselle . . . come in!'

Marie went in and found an old man ensconced in an armchair, from which he did not move. This was Monsieur Wartel. At the piano sat a young man ready to accompany her. Marie had begged her aunt and friend to stay in the other room, which they did, but directly she had tried over an exercise they burst in, demanding to know what Wartel thought of her voice.

'There's a voice there, but, you realize, it means a lot of work . . . '

'Then, Monsieur you think it's worth it?'

'Yes, yes . . . '

'But is it a fine voice?' persisted Madame de M . . . '

'It will be . . . but it must be developed . . . '

Aunt Sophie and her friend were again closeted in the next room, and Marie now suggested singing a Neapolitan song. Aunt Sophie overheard this: 'The air from *Mignon*,' she shouted. This time the old man was decidedly impressed, and told Marie definitely that if she worked she would

succeed. Meanwhile Marie had noticed the way the young man at the piano had been letting his eyes wander over the lines of her figure as if he were thinking: 'She's well made, charming, this is going to be fun.' This, coupled with Wartel's immoveability in his armchair, was a little too much, and no sooner were the three women out of the room than, 'Listen,' said Marie, 'Let us go back and tell him the truth!' A visiting card was produced, there were explanations and much laughter, and the staggered expression on the young man's face was everything Marie had intended. 'I shall never forget it,' she giggles into her diary, 'I was avenged.'

That evening Madame de M . . . dined with Marie and Aunt Sophie. The singing episode with its absurd play-acting and Wartel's evident impression over her voice had filled Marie with gaiety, and for once letting down her barriers she detailed to the older women her hopes, her ambitions. 'I felt content and showed myself as I am.' After dinner they sat outside their hotel watching all the figures that came and went in the court-yard. Up and down the gas-lit streets in the close summer night, in and out of fiacre and café, carriage and theatre, went the men and women whom we see on the canvasses of Renoir and Manet, the women with piled-up hair, tight-corseted, flounced and furbelowed, emphatically and triumphantly feminine.

During her stay Marie saw, and saw with annoyance, a girl who used to be about at Nice, and whom, with her jutting nose and scarlet face, Marie had been in the habit of despising. This girl had since married a prince and come very much to the fore. 'When I think of the happiness of Mademoiselle K . . . Princess de S . . . all my worst instincts awake, that is to say, envy! This girl at Nice so wretched, so common with her red cheeks and great Moldavian nose!' But irritation caused by the sight of the too successful Mademoiselle K. vanished in the excitement of going with Aunt Sophie to the then famous somnambulist, Alexis. Excitement is hardly a strong enough word, before the séance was over Marie was nearly beside herself. The first few moments had been disappointing. A nearly dark room with the somnambulist, a young man, lying with half-shut eyes, and telling her aunt, directly Marie's hand was put into

his: 'Your little friend is very ill.' He went on to say that Marie had chronic laryngitis but that her lungs being strong had saved her. But Marie had not come to Alexis to hear about her lungs. What she wanted was information about Antonelli, and she now produced an envelope in which was a photograph of the Cardinal. The somnambulist held the envelope against his forehead. There was a pause. Marie became impatient. 'He is a bishop,' began Alexis, 'no, he is a Cardinal.' Marie leaped in her chair, then wrenched off her shoes and flung them across the room. Alexis continued on the subject of the Cardinal: finally saying that there was the possibility he might be made Pope. On hearing this Marie tore her hat from her head, then the pins that kept up her hair, and hurled them after the shoes.

'You jump about so,' complained Alexis, 'do be calmer.'

'Yes,' she protested, 'but you say things that make me jump.' Then she pressed him to tell her the Cardinal's name.

He did. 'I had nothing more to take off,' writes Marie. 'I threw myself back in my chair.' Alexis went on. Marie plied question on question.

'Don't get excited,' he implored, 'you exhaust me.' Marie gave him a letter from Antonelli.

'He is the opposite to you,' said Alexis with a smile, and he entered into Antonelli's confusion of feeling for her. He loved her, said Alexis, but he was ambitious—then there was the Cardinal to be reckoned with, he was against Antonelli marrying Marie. Altogether the situation seemed vague: not really promising.

'Just so much yesterday as I was uplifted,' writes Marie in her diary, 'just so much to-day am I cast down.' Antonelli could not, she decided, any longer be mentioned in her prayers. Her reason was peculiar. 'Every evening I used to ask God to protect him, and that I should come out triumphant. I shall not triumph. I shall not mention it to God any more. But God knows that I want to have my revenge even while not daring to ask Him for it. Revenge is not a Christian but a noble sentiment, leave to slaves the forgiveness of injuries. Furthermore, one only forgives them when one can't do otherwise.'

Meanwhile, telegrams were beginning to arrive from her relations in Russia. Her father wired that he was 'awaiting her impatiently': Uncle Etienne that he would meet her at the frontier. But Uncle Alexander, whether because he did not want her to come to Russia or out of genuine nervousness, announced in his wire that they had an outbreak of cholera. Of this, Marie took no notice: cholera or no cholera, interview her father she must. But how far rather she would have stayed in Paris! There was a vibration of excitement in its air to which everything in her responded. Full of vague unrest she would at night, instead of going to bed, loiter about her room. One evening, finding her still up at one o'clock, Aunt Sophie urged her to undress. 'Leave me,' implored Marie, 'if you bother me I shall go mad.' Left alone she outpoured her feelings into her diary. 'O God! what idea is disturbing me again? Paris! Yes! Paris! The centre of wit, of fame! of everything! . . . intelligence and vanity, vertigo!' 'O God, give me the life I want or let me die.'

How bleak and bare compared to this exquisitely whirling Paris seemed the prospect of Russia! But—'No, no. Russia before everything. It is the foundation of everything. . . . Don't let us be led away by the will-o'-the-wisp of imagination. Russia before everything . . . ! I have written to Mama. . . . Oh, may God only help me, and all will go well.'

## 9

At seven o'clock on a July morning Marie and her aunt set off for Berlin. Marie had both her maid and her negro page with her. The negro's name had been changed from Fortuné to Chocolat. When other things failed Chocolat often proved a source of interest. 'This negro boy amuses me, he is a living toy; I give him lessons, I teach him his duties, encourage him in his sallies, in a word he is both my dog and my doll.' But Chocolat was not quite as much of a doll as she imagined. One day, giving him a New Testament lesson, they came to the account of Judas selling Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

'Chocolat, would you sell me to an enemy for thirty francs?' asked Marie.

'No.'

'For sixty?'

'Not for that either.'

'For a hundred and twenty?'

'Not for that either.'

So it went on till Marie asked him if he would for two, three, or four million.

'Five or six,' remarked Chocolat.

'But, you wretch . . . isn't it the same thing to sell anyone for thirty francs or six million!'

'Oh no! for when one has so much money as that . . . other people can't harm me.' When it came to worldliness the black boy could give his mistress points.

At Berlin Marie dragged her aunt to look at pictures, statues, engravings, miniatures. Marie, secretly comparing the size of her own hips with those of the female statues discovered to her delight—for hips were then the fashion—that hers were larger than any of them. Aunt Sophie took no interest in hips, and detested being trailed round museums and picture galleries. Each of these multitudinous objects at which she was forced to gaze in succession was to her merely another obstacle in the path that led back to her hotel, to rest, to food. 'There is nothing more terrible,' writes her niece, 'than to be with someone who is bored at what interests oneself. My aunt hurries, becomes annoyed, grumbles. It is true we had been walking about for two hours.' Aunt Sophie, with equal truth, might have said there is nothing more terrible than being forced for two hours to look at things in which one is not interested. Further groans came from her when Marie bought thirty-two more English books. 'We've already got a library!' she expostulated.

They were only going to stay a week in Berlin. Russia now loomed very near, and for a moment Marie's courage wavered. Would she after all be able to do it? Able to bring about that complete change in her father's attitude to his family that was necessary? Able to persuade him, counter to all his inclinations, to come and live with them at Nice? It seemed most unlikely. Against her were years of separation and hostility: she was, after all, only a child, and then there was not only

Constantin himself to reckon with, but all his side of the family. 'On this eve of going into Russia, of staying without my aunt, without Mama, I grow weak and feel afraid. . . . The law suit, the uncertainty, all of it . . . and then, and then, I don't know, but I'm afraid of not changing anything.

'The idea, after my return, of re-starting the same life as before, this time without hope of alteration, without having this "Russia" which consoled me for everything, and gave me some strength. . . . O God, take pity on me.'

The travellers put up one night at an inn at Eydtkühnen, for here the following day Marie's uncle, Etienne Babanine, was to come and meet her. It was Marie and Aunt Sophie's last evening together, and her aunt was melancholy at the thought of their coming parting. To see her so upset in its turn saddened Marie, and to make matters worse, Aunt Sophie began talking of the past, of Rome, and of their life at Nice. In the end Marie was reduced to tears. 'Previously to this I had not cried for a long time—no, not over being in love—no, but I wept this evening from humiliation at the recollection of our life at Nice!'

The next day Uncle Etienne arrived, and Marie and her aunt said good-bye to each other. Aunt Sophie wept. Marie, by the curious expedient of forcing her eyes to remain wide open, managed to keep her own tears from running over.

Then she and her uncle got into their train. Her Russian visit had begun.

## Chapter Five

### MARIE CONFRONTS HER FATHER

Across the flat Russian plain the train drilled its way. Within their carriage sat Marie and Uncle Etienne. Marie talked to her uncle: looked out of the window: thought how much the country was like that near Rome: and at intervals both she and her uncle fell asleep. All the time at the back of her mind lay the thought, 'I go to Russia to change our life': that was the refrain to which the reverberating wheels supplied their monotonous undertone: 'I go to Russia to change our life.'

Arrived at St. Petersburg, Marie and her uncle stayed there a week. Here Marie was reunited with her girl friends, the Sopogenikoffs, and their mother who had a house there. The morning after the travellers' arrival, 'Instead of going to see the churches,' writes Marie, 'I slept, and Nina [Madame Sopogenikoff] came and fetched me to breakfast at her house. Her parrot talked, her daughters shouted, I sang, it might have been Nice.' There they were, all three of them together again, Marie and her two Sopogenikoffs, all of them filled with the sense of their own exuberant youth and attractiveness, with delicious subconscious excitement at the experiences that life was going to bring them. Driving about the town hilariously crammed together in a fiacre, or close-closeted in one of their bedrooms, laughter shook from them: fortified by each other's giggles, life seemed made of radiant stuff fraught with endless amusement. In this dazzling companionship the Antonelli affair took on quite a different complexion: the humiliating side of it vanished and its risible aspect came to the fore: it turned into a farce in which Marie played all the rôles to a convulsed audience: 'Having found Giro in bed I stayed some time; a chance word set us talking of Rome, and vivaciously and gesticulating I recounted my adventures there. I only interrupted myself to laugh, and Giro and Marie rolled about the bed.'

'An incomparable trio. I never laugh like this except with my three Graces.'

Like Paris, the Sopogenikoffs were a delicious interlude, but an interlude only. Russia and Constantin were waiting, and Marie must continue on her way.

On the point of leaving St. Petersburg there supervened one of those awkward financial moments to which the Bashkirtseff family were liable. Marie had actually got to the station and was saying good-bye to the Sopogenikoffs when, 'Oh! what a nuisance! we hadn't got enough money, we had calculated wrong!' Aunt Sophie not being at hand to turn to, Uncle Etienne acted as her understudy and went into the town to see what he could do, and at last, at seven in the evening (Marie feeling 'slightly humiliated by this adventure') she and her uncle set off for Moscow. From there they were going on to stay with one of Marie's aunts near Grousskoë. Uncle Etienne was so anxious to make everything comfortable for his niece in the train that, poor man, he became a bore. 'Imagine,' writes Marie, 'reading a study about Cleopatra and Mark Antony, and being interrupted every instant by remarks such as—"Do you feel like eating something?"—"Perhaps you are cold?"—"Here's a roast chicken and cucumbers"—"A pear perhaps?"—"What about shutting the window?"—"What would you like to eat when we arrive?"—"I have wired for them to get your bath ready, my queen, I have had a marble one got in and the whole house has been got ready to receive her majesty.'" Really, if one did not know Uncle Etienne to be the simplest and kindest of men one might almost suspect a tinge of sarcasm.

Marie's brother, Paul, had been for some time living with his father at Gavronzi, and now, after this long separation, he and Marie re-met at the station at Grousskoë. 'Tall and big but beautiful as a Roman statue,' noted Marie. But at dinner that night, Paul's behaviour did not entirely please. During these months at Gavronzi he had been imbibing his father's attitude to the women of the family. 'I have a bath,' writes Marie, 'and we dine. Several skirmishes with Paul. He tries to pique me . . . perhaps without meaning to, obeying merely the impulse given by his father. I put him back in his place

#### MARIE CONFRONTS HER FATHER

superbly, and it is he who is humiliated when he wanted it to be me. I read to the bottom of him. Incredulity as to my success, pinpricks as to our relative positions in the world.' This preliminary slight hostility on the part of Paul prepared her for what to expect from Constantin: 'My father wants to dethrone me, I understand him, for in many things he is me.'

But this misunderstanding with Paul was on the surface only. The next day they were strolling about together arm in arm. 'I was walking along, slightly leaning on Paul's arm, when, passing under some branches that hung very low over our heads making an interlaced ceiling of leaves, I imagined what Antonelli would say if I were on his arm going along this alley. He would say, leaning slightly towards me, he would say in that languorous, moving way in which he spoke only to me . . . he would say: "How charming it is here, and how I love you."

'Nothing can give an idea of the tenderness of his voice when he spoke to me, when he said things that were for me only. . . . But,' she adds with her usual penetrating honesty, 'it was an empty tenderness . . . and if he seemed moved it was because that was his natural manner, for often one meets people who always seem in a hurry, others astonished, others sad without their being so in reality.'

'Ah! how I should like to know the truth about it all! I should like to go back to Rome married, otherwise it would be a humiliation.'

Finally, on August the 8th, Marie arrived at Poltava. Her first entry regarding this visit to her father is ominous: 'No one at the station.' Was this a move on Constantin's part to snub her the moment she arrived? There was no knowing, and Marie decided to be on the safe side and assert herself. Arrived with Paul at the Poltava hotel she sat down and wrote to the delinquent: and it seems that this letter was not the first of its kind that had been sent.

'I arrived at Poltava and did not even find a carriage.

'Come at once. I am waiting for you till midday. Really this is not a suitable reception.'

'Marie Bashkirtseff.'

Hardly had she sent off the letter before Constantin burst into the room. In describing this, to her, momentous moment, Marie, for the first, and to her credit be it said the only, time in her diary falls into the phraseology of the romantic novel of the day. 'I threw myself with noble languor into his arms.'

'How tall you are! . . . and pretty!' exclaimed Constantin.

'He was obviously satisfied with my looks,' writes Marie, 'for the first thing he did was in a sort of hurried way to glance all over me.' 'This is how I'm received,' was Marie's not very agreeable reply, 'not even a carriage. Did you get my letter?'

'No, but I've just got your telegram and I rushed here. I hoped to be in time for the train, I'm all dusty. So as to get here quicker I got into little E . . . 's troika.'

'And I wrote you such a nice letter.'

'Like your last wire?'

'Nearly!'

'Very nice . . . very nice indeed!'

'I am like that, people kow-tow to me.'

'So they do to me . . . I'm capricious as the devil.'

'And I like two!'

'You are used to people running after you like bow-wows.'

'And people must run after me, otherwise they get nothing!'

'Oh no, that won't do for me!'

'You can take it or leave it!'

Constantin saw this was the best he would get. He changed the subject. What was really exercising his mind was the question as to what impression he himself was making. This delicious creature who confronted him, so fresh and new and impertinent, stood for the land of youth: would she consider that he too still had claims to that enchanting country? He must find out. 'But why,' he went on, 'treat me in this "my father" kind of way. I'm a *bon viveur*, a young man. . . .'

'Exactly . . . so much the better.'

So he was accepted! Encouraged, Constantin went on, 'I'm not alone, I've got Prince Michael, E . . . , and your cousin, Paul G . . . with me.'

'Let them come in,' said Marie.

The two young men entered. Prince Michael, who was stepson to Marie's aunt, Princess Eristoff, was of gnome-like

appearance, and deliberately played up to it: his coat was enormous, his bow to Marie remarkable. 'Execrably amusing,' thought Marie. Paul G... known as Pacha, was noticeably the opposite, solid, serious, taciturn. But was he really taciturn, or did this silence merely show that he was thinking of something else? Marie could not make up her mind. However, she saw with satisfaction that she was making just the impression that she wished, both on her father and on these two young men. 'My father is enraptured... the conceited fellow is proud to show me off.'

Finally, the whole party drove off to Gavronzi, where they found Princess Eristoff waiting for them on the doorstep. Constantin could not conceal his pleasure at finding himself the father of such a daughter. 'Well,' he exclaimed to the Princess, 'isn't she tall... and interesting, don't you agree?'

They went into the house. Marie's eyes flicked here... flicked there. . . . She noted the family portraits, the bronzes, the Sèvres china. The servants seemed numberless, the house was all fresh with its late doing-up, through the windows the garden shone trim and gay... she had to admit to herself that, actually, she was impressed! Her father lost no time in adopting the pose of the deserted husband: the portrait he had painted of his wife was now shown to their daughter, Constantin giving vent to sighs suitable to the occasion—'he who only asked to be the model husband: that, according to Marie, was his line... 'marks of regret at the memory of lost happiness, and bursts of hatred against my grandparents who had broken up this happiness.' Meanwhile Marie noticed the 'enormous care to make me feel that my arrival alters none of the usual routine.' After a champagne luncheon ('champagne at luncheon naturally') they all went for a walk. It was not for Marie a particularly agreeable one. In the long grass she was afraid of snakes, and when she got tired and said so, Constantin merely remarked that the walk would give her an appetite. He told her that Prince Michael had been in love with a circus-rider and had followed her troupe to the Caucasus. Either from boredom or in emulation of his mistress he had employed his time learning acrobatics, and during this walk the party at one moment sat down while the little prince jumped and twisted

about in front of them to show what he was capable of. As they strolled on again, a wish arose in Constantin to give his daughter one of those mental pricks in which he was so proficient. This attractive little creature was altogether too pleased with herself, and then there was that tart reception she had given him after all his scurrying along in the dust and heat to get to her in time. Carefully he chose his needle, and with the adroitness of long practice applied it. 'I hear,' he remarked casually, 'that three months ago Antonelli got married.'

'Once back in my room' writes Marie, 'I didn't reason things out, I remembered this remark, I lay down on the floor and stayed there stupefied and wretched.' She fixed her eyes on a flower on the patterned wall-paper, and when her gaze became blurred with tears she still stared at the flower. But what use were tears? The Antonelli episode, close though it was, already belonged to the past. Her present problem was Constantin. Constantin the uncertain, the incalculable. How work on his feelings? How move him to the point of acquiescing in her projects? 'What can I do to get my father to Rome?' runs the last entry in her diary this day. 'What can I do to get my father to Rome? Bigre! Bigre! Bigre!'

## 2

Meanwhile, Constantin was determined that in his chaperonage of their daughter his wife should have no cause of complaint. He installed himself in the bedroom one side of Marie and put his valet to sleep in the room the other side. This peculiar arrangement accomplished, he thought it diplomatic to call attention to it. 'I hope she is well guarded,' he remarked to his brother-in-law, 'As you know I'm a *bon viveur*, a gay fellow [this, one notices is the way in which Constantin always liked to refer to himself], but from the moment her mother confides her to me I shall justify this confidence and fulfil my duty sacredly.'

Not many days passed after Marie's arrival before skirmishes started between her and her father. Driving alone together one afternoon on their way to the town of Poltava, Constantin

began complaining of his wife's family, saying how they, and in particular Marie's grandmother, had filched happiness from him. Marie felt the blood coming into her face, and adjured him 'to leave the dead in their graves.'

'Leave the dead alone,' cried Constantin, 'why, if I could only get hold of the ashes of that woman and . . .'

'Silence, father! You are impertinent and ill-bred.'

'Chocolat could be impertinent but not I!' exclaimed her astonished parent.

'You, dear father, and everyone who lacks refinement and education. I don't choose that anyone should talk like that. . . . You have nothing to do with the Babanines, attend to what concerns your wife and children. As to the others, don't talk of them, in the same way that I don't talk to you of your relations. Appreciate my *savoir faire* and practise it yourself.'

Constantin was only capable of a few words. 'How can you say such things to me?'

'I do say them. I repeat it, I regret having come here.' She turned her head away, for to put up such a fight had been a strain, but according to her own view she had behaved splendidly, and that night in her diary warmly commended herself: 'My child . . . (I am speaking to myself) you are an angel, positively an angel. You always knew how to behave . . . but it's only now you are beginning to put your theories into practice!'

Arrived in Poltava, 'deserted as Pompeii,' they nevertheless came across several friends of Constantin. However, though he spoke to them, he did not introduce them to his daughter, but merely made grimaces of contempt behind their back. Constantin and Marie had dinner and then went to the Poltava Theatre. Seated in their box Constantin exclaimed, 'There is your Uncle Alexander.'

'Where?'

'There, in front of us.' Uncle Alexander came round to talk to them, and Constantin urged Marie to go and speak to her Aunt Nadine. There was, in fact, a marked display of Bashkirtseff and Babanine amity. 'You see . . .,' said Constantin afterwards to Marie, 'how agreeable I am to your relations: that proves that I do know how to behave.'

'Quite right papa, anyone who wants to get on with me must do what I want....'

'Oh no!'

'Oh yes! you can take it or leave it, but admit that you are pleased to have a daughter like me, pretty, well made, graceful, intelligent, well-informed. Admit it!'

'I do admit it; it's true.'

'Aha!'

In the garden in which the theatre stood was a restaurant, and Marie now announced that they were going to have supper there.

'It's not done!' protested Constantin.

'Really, papa, with her father the *Maréchal de Noblesse* as every dog knows, and he the leader of the youth, the golden youth of Poltava!'

'But the horses are waiting.'

'That's what I want to arrange, send them back and we'll have a fly.'

'You in a fly, never! And to have supper isn't proper.'

However, in the end he agreed, ordered a private room, and he and Marie, her Uncle Alexander and Aunt Nadine, and the three young men who had also come over to Poltava—Paul, Michael, and Pacha—sat down to supper. There was also another young man whom Marie refers to as Gritz, whom she had played with as a child, and whom this day she remet for the first time. At dinner they had champagne, and several toasts were proposed. Gritz, lifting his glass and leaning towards Marie, said softly, 'To your mother,' Marie smiled back, and after several moments said loudly, 'To my mother,' and all the party drank the toast. This hardly sounds like tact, but nevertheless Marie's side of the family considered she was handling the situation admirably. 'Dear Moussia . . .,' said her Uncle Alexander, 'I'm delighted at the way you treat your relations, especially your father . . . if you keep it up all will go well, I promise you!'

'Yes,' said Paul who happened to be listening, 'if you stay for only a month you'll get the upper hand of our father, and that will be a real satisfaction to everyone.'

Enheartened by this approval Marie before long began a

little to feel her way with Constantin regarding the idea of his joining her and the others at Rome. As she and he were one day driving together through the fields he remarked, 'Well, are we going to fight each other again to-day?'

'As much as you like!' retorted his daughter.

At this Constantin put his arms round her, wrapped her in his cloak and put her head on his shoulder, where she lay with closed eyes. But Constantin's affection had its limits. 'Now,' he said after a few moments, 'sit up straight.' Marie began to talk of Rome and its society, 'taking great care to make him realize that we were thought a great deal of there, mentioning Monseigneur de Falloux, Baron Visconti, and the Pope.' After this she gave her father a sketch of Poltava society as it appeared to her. 'To spend one's life losing at cards, to ruin oneself in the depths of the provinces drinking champagne in the inns. To become dull, moss grown!... Whatever else one does one must always keep in good society....'

'Oh,' laughed Constantin, 'you seem to imply I am in bad society.'

Marie began to tack. 'I! never, I was only speaking generally,' and she went on to paint the advantages of a more social life, and succeeded to the point of making Constantin ask how much it would cost to entertain at Nice on a big scale.

'You realize,' he said, 'if I came down there and installed myself for a winter at Nice, the position would be quite different....'

'Whose position?'

'That of the birds in the sky!' and Constantin gave the laugh a man gives when he is piqued.

Marie realized she had gone too far. 'My position? Yes, quite true. But Nice is a disagreeable town.' Then for the first time she risked showing her hand. 'Why,' she added, 'shouldn't you come to Rome this winter?'

Constantin took it quite well. 'I? hm!... Yes... hm!'

'The first word,' Marie wrote in her diary that night, 'has been launched... what I'm afraid of is other people's influence. I must get this man used to me, make myself agreeable, necessary....'

'I have written nearly as much to Mama as I have in my diary,' she wrote a day or so later. 'That will do her more good than all the medicine in the world. I give her the impression of being delighted: so far I'm not . . . I'm still not certain what the actual end of the business will be. Well, we shall see. God is very good.'

## 3

Life at Gavronzi was certainly an agreeable enough existence for any girl of sixteen. Summer was afloat in the air, and within the garden stood what was known as the 'red house' where were staying Marie's brother and the other young men, Pacha, Prince Michael, and Gritz.

Marie had come to Russia with the intention of impressing Gavronzi, and she succeeded. The slightly strained attitude of her relations at the beginning had soon melted into one of delighted appreciation. Marie would appear in now one, now another, of the thirty dresses she had brought with her: and it was not only by her appearance that she impressed. She aired all her knowledge, real or spurious: one moment she would be heard discoursing on the classics; the next, detailing how to cook a chicken with truffles; the next, discussing furniture. She played, she sang, she charmed. It was a little vaudeville of one, and her audience succumbed completely. In especial Marie watched the effect she made on her father, and the effect was excellent, of that there was no doubt, and she could afford to be amused at his efforts to hide the pride he felt at finding himself possessed of such an attractive daughter.

Naturally the four young men were in and out of 'the big house' all day, the admiration they each felt for this girl who had suddenly appeared in their midst whipped up by an inevitable sense of competition. Not that any of them intended to let themselves go so far as to fall in love with her.

Little Prince Michael was a most agreeable worldling, ready to talk to Marie of clothes or any other subject in which she gave the lead. 'He's said to be stupid,' she writes, a little puzzled, 'and he talks of everything, music, art, science.' But a moment's more thought made her realize that it was really

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she who did all the talking, Michael's part being merely to remark at intervals, 'Exactly, you are quite right.' Marie liked to feel she was impressing the little prince, but the most interesting of the young men was undoubtedly her cousin, Pacha. There was about him that kind of silent aloofness which inevitably raises a wish in other people to know what are the thoughts behind such reticence. He had an immense devotion for his mother, a devotion that acted as a screen through which the charms of other women could not penetrate, and he took the first opportunity of warning Marie not to expect that which was not going to happen. When they were talking together one morning, Marie remarked how curious it was the way a son would criticize his father, only in his turn to be criticized for the very same behaviour by his own son.

'That's perfectly true,' said Pacha, '... but my sons won't criticize me because I shan't ever marry.'

There was a slight pause, and then, 'There have never yet,' said Marie, 'been any young people who have not said the same thing.'

'Yes, but with me it isn't the same thing.'

'Why not?'

'Because I'm twenty-two, and I've never yet been in love, and no woman has attracted me.'

'That's quite natural, up to that age one oughtn't to fall in love.'

'Well, and what about all these boys who fall in love at fourteen?'

'All those kind of love affairs have nothing to do with love.'

'Perhaps . . .,' said Pacha.

A hot summer's evening at Gavronzi. In the big drawing-room upstairs a piano had been put for Marie to play on, and this particular evening she was sitting playing away at it, decked out in a Louis XV dress of white silk and oriental gauze. The young men and a neighbour, Kapitanenko, were grouped round her. Marie only played moderately well, as

she herself admits, but her audience was more than satisfied. '*Mon Dieu . . .*' cried Kapitenenko, 'listening to you I forget that for six years I've been growing rusty and mouldy in the country. I live again!' Constantin stretched out on the sofa, and the Princess, who was working, said nothing, but their attitude was appreciative.

'That's what we'll do when I go abroad,' remarked Marie to her father as, at ten o'clock, good-nights were being said—and then, making a dash at it, she added, 'you will come with me.'

'I'll think it over,' said Constantin, 'yes, possibly.'

The whole party was apparently so astounded at this concession that for a few moments no one spoke.

'Well, what do you think of me?' Marie that night demanded of her readers.

A morning at Gavronzi. Early morning before breakfast. Marie, already up and about, wandered into her father's bedroom and found him in his shirt sleeves struggling with his cravat: she tied it for him and kissed his forehead.

But behind all this pretty amiability of piano playing and cravat tying, hostility lurked. With the censoriousness of the very young, Marie and Paul resented Constantin's unfaithfulness to their mother, even when she chose to live apart from him. Now, during his daughter's visit to Gavronzi, Constantin, after his meticulous chaperonage of her during the day, would in the evening when good nights had been said despatch the young men to the Red House, and himself, according to Marie, 'rush off to the forest like a wolf'—presumably on his way to one of his inamoratas. In consequence, when bedtime came it amused Marie, instead of going up to her room and so letting her father off duty, to dawdle about talking aimlessly.

Nor was this habit of Constantin the only source of friction at work. It was the day of the photograph album: not of snapshots pasted into brown-leaved books but of 'studio portraits' that were slid into the ponderous album between stiff card-board sheets. Not only were the portraits kept in this way, but these albums were laid on the central round table in the

drawing-room, ostensibly to be looked at, and constantly were looked at, with the result that they often gave the impetus to a good deal of by-play. Everyone seems as a matter of course to have possessed his or her own particular album, and Paul had his. On one of its pages was the portrait of an actress, but Paul, having become aware of a nearer relationship between this woman and his father than that of actress and spectator, considered it an insult to have her portrait cheek by jowl with those of his own family, so drew it out. Constantin, happening to look through the album, noticed the blank page, and perfectly aware of his son's motive, retaliated by drawing out his own portrait.

'Why do you do that?' demanded Paul.

'Because I am afraid you'll throw away my portrait *as well*.'

Marie was in the room at the time, and therefore understood when a day or so later Paul, taking her aside, showed her his album now empty except for one portrait, that of the reinstated actress. 'I did that to please my father,' explained Paul, 'but I had to take out all the other portraits . . . here they are.'

'Let me look at them,' said Marie. Her brother gave her the bunch, and she picked out those of her grandparents, her mother, and herself, and put them in her pocket.

'What do you mean by that?' asked Paul.

'I mean,' replied Marie, 'that I am taking back our portraits which find themselves in too bad company.'

At this Paul was 'ready to cry', and seizing his album he tore it in half and left the room. Marie was in no way disturbed at this outburst. It was a habit of her and Paul when annoyed to tear things in half, they looked upon it as a convenient outlet for emotion, and in her diary Marie merely remarks with satisfaction that the fact of her pocketing the portraits and her reason for doing so were sure to come to her father's ears.

It had been hot the evening Marie played the piano in the drawing-room, and each day the heat grew. The garden, a-flicker with sunlight, became the playground for Marie and the young men, and in and out of the patches of shade they idled and talked and played croquet. A new set of this game

had been specially bought to amuse Marie, also, strange as it seems, a microscope, complete with a 'collection of fleas'. The croquet set proved a good deal more popular than the fleas, and mallet and ball provided a useful opportunity for the flirtatious rivalry among the young men. For it was not only the heat in the air that was on the increase. There was great competition now to pick up the train of Marie's dress as it trailed over the daisies, or if tiring of the garden and croquet they went indoors for Marie to do a sketch of one of them, the chosen would be eyed all the time by the others who sat round. Marie showed a certain cleverness in the way she dashed off these sketches: one day, in thirty-five minutes, she did portraits of both her father and Paul. Gavronzi was impressed. 'My father,' writes Marie triumphantly, 'who looked on my talent as empty bragging, recognized it and was pleased. I was overjoyed, for to paint is to be on the road to one of my goals. Every hour passed except those spent in coquetry (for coquetry leads to love, and love, possibly, to marriage) is like a weight on my head. Read? No! Act? Yes.'

All this attention Marie received from the young men was very satisfactory, but, as the weeks succeeded each other, she found it a trifle boring. These boys were charming, obliging, pliable, but not one of the three struck the note to which Marie responded. Among them there was, in appearance, no Hamilton, in seduction, no Antonelli. Neither were they particularly intelligent. Marie, ever on the alert for the perfecting of her own personality, was afraid she might catch their dullness. Horrible thought! 'When I am with dull men I become stupid, I don't know what to say that they'll find intelligible, and every moment I'm afraid they'll suspect me of being in love with them. Like this poor Gritz: he thinks every young woman wants him and in the slightest smile sees traps and plots against his celibacy.'

Gritz's admiration for Marie may have been superficial only, but with one of the men, with Pacha the silent, the taciturn, it was otherwise. He watched her—those soft curves within those bewildering Paris extravagances, those quick-sliding eyes beneath that young, gay brow: he listened to her—that quizzical banter, those little flippant arabesques of talk so

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different, so deliciously different to the flat observations of most people; he watched and he listened; and sombrely, ponderously, reluctantly, he fell in love.

Marie did not at once realize the difference of texture between Pacha's attentions and those of Gritz and Michael. 'Pacha,' she writes amusedly one day, 'was uplifted to the point of asking me for my portrait to carry in a medallion all his life. "For I honour and love you like no one else!"' The Princess opened her eyes, and I laughed, asking my cousin to kiss my hand. He became obstinate, went red, and ended by doing it.'

'A shy queer fellow,' goes on Marie. 'This afternoon I was talking of my contempt for the human race. "Oh, that's it, is it?"' exclaimed the over-sensitive Pacha. '"Then I'm a good-for-nothing...."' And red and trembling he rushed out of the drawing-room.'

Meanwhile, Marie was decidedly making headway with her father. The idea she had put into his mind of going back with her had been germinating, and the moment arrived when he decided to talk it over. 'This morning my father came into my room, and after a few ordinary observations, Paul having left us, there came a silence during which I felt my father had something to say, and as I wanted to talk of the same thing I purposely kept silent, as much so as not to be the first to begin as to have the pleasure of seeing the hesitation and embarrassment of someone other than myself.'

'"Hm!... well... what do you say?"' brought out Constantin at last.

'"I, papa? Nothing."

'"Hm!... you said... Hm!... That I should come to Rome with you... Hm!... well, how?"'

'"But it's quite simple."

'"But . . ."' began Constantin, then hesitated, and began to fidget with Marie's hairbrushes. '"But if I come with you,"' he went on, '"Hm!... and mama... she will not come? And then... you see, if she doesn't... hm!... how can it be arranged?"'

“Aha, wretched parent! There we are! It’s you now who hesitate . . . delightful! . . .”

“Mama?”

“Mama will come.”

“Ah?”

“Mama will do everything I want. She does not exist any more, there is no one but me.”

Constantin accepted this arrogant wiping out of his wife’s individuality without comment. It simplified a situation which from his point of view bristled with awkwardnesses, and he now entered into every kind of detail with Marie as to how her mother spent her time, and as to what were her occupations. If he were going for several months to reknit his life with hers he naturally wished to know what kind of existence he would be expected to lead.

While Marie had been occupied in arranging her future to her liking, Chocolat had been arranging his. We are not told the circumstances in which Marie had taken him into her service or we should know better what grounds she had for her burst of indignation when she found that he had written to his mother asking if he could stay on in Russia in another household where he had been offered higher wages. This ingratitude says Marie, made her fear for his character, and, sending for him, she denounced his behaviour in front of all her family and ordered him to go down on his knees. At this moment Marie does not appear in a pleasant light, but in fairness to her it must be remembered that when she was born the Russian serf had not been liberated: she was accustomed to the tradition of family slaves. Now, ordered to his knees, Chocolat refused, and it was not till Marie took him by his shoulders and knees to bend him into the desired position that he obeyed with a crash that set tottering some china-filled shelves at his elbow. Marie then gave him an oration on the evilness of his behaviour, ending up by saying she would send him back to France in the fourth class in company with cows and sheep.

‘Shame, shame! Chocolat! You will be a lost man. Fi! Get up and go.’

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When at last the black boy, convinced by her arguments, was reduced to tears and a demand for forgiveness: 'Very well,' said Marie, 'you may go, I forgive you, but you understand that all this is for your good?'

One hopes that Chocolat shared her conviction.

The heat at Poltava was becoming overwhelming. Slowly each day burgeoned and ripened till it lay swooning in the glare of noon: slowly and languorously it dwindled, and night drew over the country a thin curtain of dark. The lassitude in the air affected Marie with equal lassitude of spirit. Certainly such distractions for his house party as were within his power Constantin provided. Occasionally a few hours would be got through by all of them going down to the river, and there, seated on rugs spread beneath the trees, they would fish and eat water melons. One day Marie bought a peasant's dress, and rigging herself up in it drove with her father about the village. Another day she put on her riding habit *à la Amazone* and her embroidered top boots, and mounting a horse, with a good deal of bravado, showed off to her family. A mild amusement was provided by her being carried about by the young men on a piece of carpet. One evening they were taking her in this fashion upstairs to her bedroom when, at the top of the flight leading from the hall, they came to a halt. Marie in her white dress posed herself half-way up, the boys grouping themselves round her just below. How easily imagination repaints the picture . . . the hot summer's night floating into the house through every wide-flung window, the soft lamp-light of the hall turning Marie as she sits there in her dress of the 'seventies into a figure of gleaming fairness and whiteness; the young men, half laughing, half serious, fallen into youth's limply graceful attitudes on the steps below her: Pacha, humbly gazing, his sadness only too well symbolized by this girl's position, seated unattainably above him; the little prince eyeing and desiring, expressing his feelings in his own dapper manner by conventionally dropping on one knee—for this falling on the knee in front of a pretty woman was a commonplace of the day that could mean everything or nothing. Paul and Gritz

complete the staircase group. On the outskirts is the Princess, her work folded, girt for bed; and Constantin, his pride in the pretty creature posed there in front of him struggling with his wish for them all to get off to bed and leave him to his own devices. Chocolat is there too, his oily blackness striking an unexpected and alien note, a hint of nights other than this—jungle nights, lush, savage, profound . . . yes, the whole thing makes a charming picture in the sense of a tribute to that spirit of romance which is now at such a discount. To complete it, all they have to do is to sing . . . and . . . listen! that now is what they are doing. First Marie: and then Chocolat is made to sing too: in those days a strange anomaly—a negro singing French songs, songs of the people of Nice, in a Russian country house.

## 5

During Marie's visit Constantin betook himself for a couple of days to Karkoff. This he considered a suitable occasion on which to let off his nine cannon. As a farewell to the house party? In honour of his daughter's visit? As a reminder to her that though he gave in to her whims he was still master of the situation? We do not know. The psychology of Constantin and his guns remains obscure.

Meanwhile, Marie continued to yawn. The cause of her boredom puzzled her: 'Here, at Gavronzi, I want nothing, I regret nothing, everything is done as I wish, and all the same I am *bored*. Must I consider, then, that I am simply bored by the country?' No, that she could not admit: no one of her generation who took pride in greatness of soul could, so firmly rooted was the idea that to be bored when surrounded by trees and grass proved pettiness of spirit.

Occasionally the emotional divagations of one or other of the men around her freshened Marie's mental lassitude. There was, for instance, that illuminating talk she had one evening with the Princess, Michael's stepmother. For the sake of coolness the two women were sitting on a balcony overlooking the picture prettiness of the Gavronzi property. Spread out before them lay the fields, the hill with its church 'half

drowned in trees', and nearer at hand the Red House, the garden with pavilions scattered here and there among the greenness, the Gavronzi courtyard with its servants' quarters looking like a little village; and Marie, gazing, felt soothed to think that everything before her was owned by her family: 'the thought that all this is ours... all belongs to us, and the servants, nearly sixty of them, and everything!...' Away below them lay the river under heavy-hanging trees, where at this moment, staring the dim water with their white bodies, the boys were bathing. All was perfectly still. Even now at the end of the day no faintest air ruffled the leaves. Marie sat idly gazing; but her aunt's voice falling on the torpid air was saying something of interest. She was telling how yesterday Michael had come to her and said, 'Mama, marry me.' By which phrase, that falls so strangely on English ears, he meant, presumably, that he wished to be given enough money to marry on.

'Who to?' demanded his stepmother.

'To Moussia.'

'Idiot! You are only eighteen!'

But Michael had persisted, and so seriously that in the end, to use Marie's words, the Princess 'was obliged to tell him to go to the devil'.

Paul, too, enlightened his sister as to the state of Michael's affections. 'Michael is a good fellow,' explained Paul, 'but he's never been about with anyone but *femmes à souper*, and he doesn't know how to behave, and, too, he's got an evil tongue. For example, what happened the other day. He said he'd like to...' Here Paul broke off, then went on, 'Well, he's madly in love with you and is ready for any mischief going. I've spoken about it,' he went on confusedly, 'to Uncle Alexander, and he said I ought to have boxed his ears. Aunt Natalie thinks so too.'

However, it appears that the extent of the little prince's villainy was that he had been trying to make mischief between Marie and Gritz. The truth is that what with heat and boredom the nerves of the house-party were on edge. The heat made them all restless; what to do in the evening became a daily problem: impossible to sit quietly in the drawing-room

in that indoor stuffiness; and limp and inert they would draggle about the garden. One evening, when two of what Marie called the 'Poltava crocodiles'—that is, friends of her father who lived there—came to dinner, Constantin provided a mild diversion by having Venetian lanterns hung on the balcony of the Red House and all round the courtyard. Then, after dinner, fireworks were let off. Those streaks of light, spurting up in this little world of half dark created by the lit lanterns, were pretty enough, but the charm of Venetian lamps and fireworks has its limit. Soon the eternal question arose—what could they do till bedtime? Tranquil and lovely the summer night lay over the country. Constantin proposed a walk, no one seemed able to think of anything better, so off they set. Coming to the village cabaret they sat down outside, where a woman was dancing to a violin. But the violinist was accustomed to play second fiddle, and in spite of there being no first fiddle, persisted in playing second. The Gavronzi party endured it for half an hour; then a feeling arose in them that this man must definitely be made to stop. It flashed into Constantin's mind that here was an excuse to make one of those deafening noises from which he drew such peculiar pleasure. To drown a fiddler with nine cannon would be a little overdoing it, but gunpowder was not Constantin's only means of making a noise. At the top of Gavronzi hung a monster bell for use as a fire alarm. The very thing! Off they set, he and Paul and Marie, all three transformed suddenly into hilarious children bent on mischief—up to the top of the house, up the rickety steps of an old ladder and then . . . Clang! Clang!

After this exertion, Marie went off to her room, where her father came and talked to her. 'My nerves were on edge,' says Marie, 'and I cried all the time.' This must have been trying for Constantin, but he behaved charmingly to his weeping daughter. In fact, ever since her arrival at Gavronzi he had been gradually becoming more and more agreeable, and this evening, writes Marie, 'he said such tender things in his dry rough manner that I was touched.' In spite of her tears they got through a good deal of talk, Constantin urging Marie not to marry Michael who, he said, was *un animal à argent*. Marie reassured him on this point, for she had no wish or intention

of uniting her destiny with that of Michael. After this they talked, says Marie comprehensively, 'of everything.'

Another day when they were together Constantin revealed to her the most unexpected ideas and feelings. He was deplored his irregular way of life, but added that he lacked something, was not happy . . . and here he sighed. Marie laughed and asked: 'Who are you in love with then?'

'Do you want to know?' and, most surprisingly, Constantin went so red that 'he buried his head in his arms to conceal his face'.

'I do want to know—tell me.'

'With Mama.' His voice trembled as he said it. His emotion touched Marie, and to hide her embarrassment she laughed.

'I knew you wouldn't understand!' cried out Constantin.

'Forgive me, but this romantic matrimonial passion is so unlike you . . . '

'Because you don't know me! But I swear, I swear to you it's true. Before this picture of my grandmother, before this cross, on the blessing of my father,' and Constantin crossed himself before a picture and a cross that hung above the bed. 'Perhaps,' he went on, 'it's because I always see her young as she was then, because in imagination I live in the past. When they separated us I nearly went mad. I went on foot on pilgrimage to pray to the Virgin of Ahtirna—but it's said that that Virgin brings bad luck, and it's true, for after that things were worse than ever. And then . . . you will laugh . . . when you were living at Kharkoff I used to go there by myself secretly, I used to take a fly and watch your rooms, I used to stay there the whole day to see *her* go by, and then I would come back without being seen.'

'If it were true, it would be very touching!' remarked his daughter.

Constantin took this without blanching. 'And tell me,' he went on, 'as we are talking of Mama . . . has she . . . has she an aversion for me?'

'An aversion! Why? No, not in the least.'

'Because . . . sometimes . . . one does feel like that . . . insurmountable antipathies.'

'No, no,' Marie reassured him.

Constantin went on talking for a long time about his wife. 'I spoke of her,' said Marie, 'as the saint that she is.'

What Constantin's real feelings were it is impossible to say. One thing, however, seems clear, and that is that his daughter had reminded him of his wife, that Marie's youth had brought back to him the memory of his own, and that his imagination, dwelling on the past, had caught fire; hence this surprising confession. One can only remark with Marie that 'romantic matrimonial passion' was very unlike him.

It was settled that the Gavronzi party should spend a night at a little house Michael had taken at Poltava. It seems it was a new purchase as he was not yet properly settled in, and so as to get everything ready he left Gavronzi at five o'clock on the morning of the day of their visit. Marie was delighted with the house. 'In all Russian houses there is, beyond the hall, a sitting-room; this room is all white, then a charming maroon-coloured one, and a bedroom for me full of all necessary and delightful details.... Just think, on the dressing-table I found powder and rouge!' They had great fun running about and admiring the little house till, at dinner time, they discovered that though their host had remembered to put down a carpet, to hang up mirrors, to acquire lamps, beds, face-powder, and rouge, he had completely forgotten to get in anything to eat. Michael tried to excuse himself by every lie he could think of, but they teased him so mercilessly that by the time dinner was at last brought in from some club—it being then nearly ten o'clock—the wretched boy was so abashed that he remained 'quite embarrassed' all through the meal.

At last they got to bed. But no sooner had Marie gone to her room than she heard piercing screams from her maid, Amalia; for Paul had opened a window looking on to a gallery in which, certainly it seems a little oddly, Amalia had chosen to have her bath. 'What a boy!' comments Marie in her diary, and getting into bed, falls asleep.

A few days later Marie and Constantin were out driving, and went to see *le préfet*. He asked Marie how long she was staying with her father; she answered that she hoped to take

him away with her. The father and daughter paid various other visits, and then drove home in the summer twilight. ‘You heard,’ began Constantin, ‘what *le préfet* said when you told him you wanted to take me away with you?’

‘What did he say?’

‘He told me that as *maréchal de la noblesse* I should have to get permission from the minister.’

‘Well, ask for it quickly so that there won’t be anything to keep us staying on here too long.’

‘Very well.’

‘Then you are coming with me?’ (‘It was,’ says Marie, ‘past eight o’clock, and in the dimness of the carriage I was able to talk of it all without my wretched face becoming involved.’)

‘Yes,’ said Constantin.

‘You mean it seriously?’

‘Yes,’ said Constantin.

On that ‘yes’ hung at present Marie’s every hope; for that she had separated herself from her family, precipitated herself across Europe, exerted her utmost intelligence. And now Constantin had said it, was coming back with her, really coming! She, Marie, was justified in her faith in herself: she had believed she could do it, and she had done it.

## 6

Pacha meanwhile was still, a little laboriously, in love. So surprisingly new to him were any emotions of the kind that Marie in derision nicknamed him ‘the Green Man’. He did not resent it. Gaily Marie would probe and question while he, wincing but flattered, would fumble in his mind to find words to describe, and yet not to describe too revealingly, what he felt. He would not say directly that it was Marie with whom he was in love: little experience as he had had with women he well knew that there was no hope for him there.

‘Pacha,’ said Marie one day as they knocked the wooden balls through the croquet hoops, ‘Pacha, what would you do to a woman who had offended me, cruelly offended me?’

‘I should kill her.’

'... you are laughing, Pacha.'

'And you?' Pacha was already profiting by companionship with his quick-tongued cousin.

Marie, being what she was, was annoyed when Pacha, leaving Gavronzi, went to pay his mother a visit. In mock annoyance Marie made him such a bitter farewell speech that tears came to the boy's eyes. Marie was amused, but Pacha's mother, when she realized the situation, was not. This dragon-fly of a girl had come flashing into their quiet back-water, stirring Pacha in a way he had never been stirred before, but to what purpose except to make him unhappy? Pacha's mother, a lame woman, coming herself on a visit to Gavronzi before her son returned there, regarded Marie with no friendly eye; and when Marie pressed her to persuade Pacha to come back, exclaimed: 'No, no, he must stay down there. You are bored here and having nothing to do you torment him; he came back to me quite crushed and stunned.'

Marie took the line of pretending not to understand. 'I don't think Pacha is the sort of man to take offence at a few friendly jokes. If I make jokes and tease him a little it's because he's a near relation—a brother almost.'

Without speaking the elder woman leisurely looked her up and down. 'Do you know what is the height of folly?' she asked at last.

'No.'

'To fall in love with Moussia.'

'I reddened,' says Marie, 'up to my ears.'

In time Pacha did return, and once more submitted, an anguished but not altogether unwilling victim, to Marie's investigations as to his state of mind. He, his mother, and Marie found themselves together one day in the drawing-room. Marie was standing gazing at her reflection in a looking-glass. Her hair was, she decided, too long, and she picked up a pair of scissors. As she snipped she gave the others her views on love. Then Pacha gave his. 'It is pretty certain I shall fall in love,' he remarked, 'but I shall never marry.'

'What, Green Man! why men are thrashed for saying a thing like that.'

'Because . . .' Pacha hesitated, 'I should want my love to last for ever, in imagination at least. . . . Marriage extinguishes love.'

'Oh! Oh!'

'Quite right,' approved his mother. Pacha went scarlet.

'Catch,' said Marie, tossing him a little tuft of her hair. She was startled at the effect it had on him: 'his voice, his expression quivered, and when I wanted to take it back he looked at me so queerly, like a child who has got hold of a toy that to him is of immense value.'

In reading these easy-running conversations, these exactly described emotions that Marie had seen impressed for a moment on a boy's face, it all seems so natural, so inevitable, that one is inclined to forget that writing that appears inevitable is writing that is essentially good, for it means that the inevitability, the sequence and flow of life itself has spilled on to the page.

Slowly the days, the weeks had crept along: slowly they had crept away, and with their passing had gone summer and summer's heat. September had come, bringing with it cold and mist and rain. Marie went out one day with the men of the family and twenty-nine dogs wolf-hunting. But no wolves appeared. Another day she added to her stock of experiences by letting off a gun for the first time and killing a crow. But as the year dipped further into autumn her impatience at being cooped up at Gavronzi grew. Having persuaded Constantin to go back with her, the object of her visit was accomplished, now she was merely marking time till she could be off. It seems that the length of her stay had been fixed before she came, and she could not very well say, 'Now I have had enough.' Remain till the day arranged she must.

Silence and cold enwrapped Gavronzi. Outside its walls lay the world waiting for her to come and make her mark on it: far away across those bleak, wind-swept plains lay the cities with their clamour and their excitement, the successes to be gained, the prizes to be won. . . . There were moments when the sense of imprisonment, of being forcibly held back, frenzied her. The glamour that lies over a new place on first arriving

had evaporated: she had drawn off from these people all that was to be got from them, she was through with them. God! to get away from it all! 'I cry with boredom, I want to go... I am wasting my time, my life, I am wretched... I am *agacée*. Oh! that's just the word!... Yesterday I was so desperate that I felt I was chained to Russia for ever, I felt ready to climb the walls....'

But this sense of frustration she kept to herself: outwardly she was all cheerfulness. That, in fact, was one of her exasperations: that it should be she who had to supply all the vitality for the rest of the party. 'Family evenings, charming jokes, a gaiety supplied entirely by me,' she writes derisively. The staircase tableau had become an institution, the accepted finale with which to end the day. Each evening as, seated in an arm-chair, she was carried up to her room by the young men she would notice her dangling feet reflected in a looking-glass on the stairs. She could not resist each evening turning to look at them: there they were, just as they had been yesterday and the day before; just as they would be to-morrow and the day after. These dangling feet became a symbol of the repetitive boredom of her days. And, besides the boredom, Marie had another cause for discontent. Constantin's attitude towards her had changed; only at times now was he the affectionate parent. As the weeks passed he positively could not prevent coming to the surface the bitterness he felt against the Babanine family, and to have Marie there in front of him, the nerve centre as it were of this family which, so he considered, had cruelly wronged him, was temptation too great to be resisted. Once more his conversational needles came into requisition, and the realization that his daughter, wishing to make herself agreeable, was forced to contain herself however much he pricked and jabbed, probably amused him a good deal. 'My nerves,' Marie writes after one particularly bad day, 'feel all to pieces at being forced to listen to wounding allusions to my relations, and not being able to show I'm offended. I should certainly have stopped my father's mouth if it weren't for the miserable fear of losing my wherewithal....' Here she breaks off. 'Coming back to my room I felt like throwing myself on the ground and bursting into tears, I kept a hold on myself, and it has

passed. That is what I shall always do. One must not let people to whom one is indifferent have the *power* to make one suffer. When I suffer I am humiliated; it's repugnant to me to think that such or such a person has been able to hurt me.' But as she wrote, her sanguine love of life, her buoyant youngness surged up in her: 'Oh, well,' she writes enthusiastically, if a shade confusedly, 'oh, well, in spite of everything life is still the best thing in the world.'

But Constantin was not entirely to blame for his gradual change of feeling towards his daughter. Marie having once got his promise that he would come back with her had not troubled to keep that tight curb on her behaviour and her criticisms that she had during the first part of her visit. Constantin, so she writes one day, 'had been wounded by my final remark yesterday.' What this final remark was we are not told, but Marie had been brought up on the curious assumption that cutting observations from a woman to a man serve to display her piquancy and charm. Like many people she only noticed the law of cause and effect when it acted in her favour. She had never connected Antonelli's lack of ardour with her diatribes against his character: and with Constantin she had understood how natural it was for him to like her and to give proof of this liking ('how could he behave otherwise to a daughter who is witty, cultured, agreeable, charming and good-natured, for here I am all this, and he says so himself'), but she did not allow for his inevitable adverse reaction when she behaved badly. And, occasionally, during the last part of her visit she did behave atrociously. At the beginning of November there was a concert at Poltava to which she wished to go. Constantin on the other hand did not wish to go. Marie was astounded. 'There!' she exclaims, 'at the end of three months of cajolery and sweetness . . . charm and agreeableness I receive . . . violent opposition to my going to this wretched concert!' Finally, they did go but, just about to start, Constantin took objection to Marie's clothes: he thought her too smart and wanted her to put on 'a woollen dress, a walking get-up'. It is impossible for us to know what would have been precisely the right clothes in which to go to a provincial concert in Russia in the November of 1876, but Marie was inclined to

The children sang it for days on end as they pranced about the house and garden: it was a banner of gaiety that their voices tossed to and fro. . . . Yes, to be with the Sopogenikoffs was to be always finding nuggets of gold in the ordinary earth of life. The joy of the Sopogenikoffs was one joy: ~~and~~ the joy of being in love with Hamilton was another and a different joy.

In the middle of January, on one of those misting days when it is hard to tell whether it is raining or not, Marie was out walking with Mademoiselle Colignon, and suddenly a half-closed landau swept by them. But, though half-closed, Marie had just for an instant caught sight of the Duke inside it gazing straight in front of him. The direction in which he was going meant that he was on his way to his mistress. ‘O caro Hamilton!’ ‘Seeing me go red Mademoiselle said almost severely, “Don’t do that, Marie, it so unnerves me.”’ Yes, if only she could stop it! This rush of colour gave away her secret to every one. But God no doubt could control her circulation if she could not. And she added a clause to that effect in her prayers.

At the end of the month, away across the water she saw a yacht ‘with a big English flag’, and knew it to be the Duke’s. The yacht was not he, but it belonged to him, and her eyes drank it in: by staring very hard she could just see some ladies on the bridge ‘and the red parasol of the W....’ Then, encased in the blue of sky and sea, the yacht glided on to Monte Carlo; and Marie returned to her diary to write it all down.

In February she was with the others at, it appears, a race-meeting, when ‘All at once I heard someone whistling behind me. It was the Duke. He was whistling like he was the first evening when I saw him at Baden. He was whistling (even to write it makes my heart beat).

‘I turned round, he saw me, then I went red and my heart began to beat like a hammer. He wore a coat made rather in the style of my cloak, a blue shirt, a maroon-coloured hat. For a moment he stayed close by me, never had I imagined such great happiness! . . . What I want now is that he should know that I love him.’ Yes, her feelings were now so brimming over that somehow she positively must make him realize what

#### MARIE CONFRONTS HER FATHER

bye; who look on pieces of wood and stuff as friends which by being useful to you and constantly seen . . . become part of your life. Jeer if you like! The most subtle sentiments are the most easily ridiculed.'

Marie's relations, her uncle Alexander and his wife, now lived at Tcherniakoff, and one can enter into their feelings when Marie calmly began taking down from the walls, first, various gold and silver-covered effigies, and then all the pictures that she considered good, with the intention of embellishing the house at Nice. Aunt Nadine and Uncle Alexander might sigh both over the rape of their pictures and the ugly marks left on the walls where they had been, but these considerations did not disturb Marie. 'One is said to be a Veronese,' she writes with satisfaction, 'one a Dolci, but I shall find out about them at Nice.' It seems that the house and its contents actually still belonged to her grandfather, and therefore according to her view there was no reason why she should not take what she liked. 'Once I got going,' she writes, 'I should like to have taken everything.' We are not surprised to hear that 'Uncle Alexander looked annoyed'.

She consoled her hosts for her depredations by singing to them; and while she sang she walked up and down the room. She was too nervous to stand still, for her voice was so fragile, so easily put out of order that she never knew from day to day or from hour to hour whether she could make use of it. And of all things in her life it was to her the most valuable, the treasure that was to make all doors open before her, that was to bring her everything she craved. And to have her whole future dependent on a thing so unreliable, so elusive! Her nervousness is understandable.

Marie was back at Gavronzi for the last few weeks of her visit.

Pacha was becoming more used to the condition of being in love, and one day, hard pressed on the subject, admitted what he felt for her. This was most interesting! Marie could not resist a more minute examination of his feelings.

'Then you always find me attractive?'

'Oh, Moussia! How can you expect me to talk about it?'

'But quite simply. Why these reticences? . . . I shan't make fun of you; if I laugh, it's my nerves, nothing else. Then I don't attract you any longer?'

'Why not?'

'Oh! because, because . . . I don't know.'

'One can't explain that sort of thing.'

'If I don't attract you, you can say so—you are frank enough, and I am indifferent enough. . . . Now then, is it the nose? or the eyes?'

'One can see you have never been in love.'

'Why?'

'Because the moment one begins to analyse anyone's features, how the nose is better than the eyes, or the eyes than the mouth . . . that means one is not in love.'

'Perfectly true; who told you?'

'No one' . . . 'No,' went on Pacha, 'one can't say what it is that's attractive . . . it's your air, your manner, and your character—that especially.'

'It's good?'

'Yes, except when you're play-acting. . . .'

'Right again. . . . And my face?'

'There are fine lines in it . . . what one calls classical.'

'Yes, we know that. And what else?'

'And what else? There are women one sees go by who one says are pretty, and one doesn't think of them again. . . . But there are faces that . . . are pretty and charming and which leave a lasting impression. . . .'

'Perfect . . . and then?'

'How you do go on with your questions!'

'I'm making the most of my opportunity of finding out a little what people think of me; I shan't easily find anyone else I can question like this without compromising myself. And how did it take you? Did it come all at once or little by little?'

'Little by little.'

'Hm! Hm!'

'It's better that way—more lasting. What one loves in a day one ceases to love in a day, whilst . . .'

'Our talk,' says Marie, 'went on for a long time, and I began

to feel a considerable respect for this man whose love is reverent as a religion.'

Association with Marie had made Pacha too think of the necessity of making a noise in the world. One day when she was painting and at the same time expatiating on her favourite theme, he suddenly got up and walked up and down the room murmuring, 'One must do something, one must do something.' Later on he told her he was going into the army, 'To win fame, I tell you so, frankly.' 'These words,' says Marie, spoken 'half timidly, half audaciously . . . gave me enormous pleasure.'

For Pacha to drive under soft falling snowflakes in a *troika* with this girl wedged in between him and Paul: to watch her in the evening across the lamp-lit room as she sat playing at the piano; to carry her books upstairs for her to her bedroom —these things did not help to cool the blood of a young man in love. On one of these evenings Marie had been playing airs from *La Belle Hélène*, then she turned to Mendelssohn . . . 'something,' she writes, 'slow, passionate, tender . . . as only Mendelssohn's *Romances sans Paroles*, properly understood, can be.' Then, drinking off one cup of tea after another, she talked of music.

'It has a most powerful effect on me,' said Pacha, 'it makes me feel quite strange . . . sentimental . . . in listening to it one says what otherwise one would never dare to. . . .'

'It is a traitress, Pacha, beware of music. . . .'

Then she began talking of Rome and the somnambulist, Alexis. 'Pacha,' she writes, 'listened and sighed in his corner; and when he came near the light the expression of his face told me more than all the words in the world what the poor boy was suffering.' ('Notice,' she comments, 'this ferocious vanity, this avidity to remark the ravages which one has caused. . . .')

'We are melancholy this evening,' she said gently.

"“Yes,” he said with an effort, “you have been playing and . . . I don’t know, I think I’m feverish.”'

'Go to bed, *mon ami*, I am going up. But just help me carry my books.'

Before Marie left Gavronzi she and Constantin had a final splutter. It appears to have been at tea-time. ‘We were hardly in the drawing-room,’ she writes, ‘before my father started his pin-pricking.’ As Marie took no notice, Constantin, determined to rouse her, exclaimed: ‘Your mother tells me that I shall end my days with her in the country! Never!’

‘The only reply,’ says Marie, ‘would have been instantly to leave the room.’ But she controlled herself. ‘I will keep in my seat,’ she decided, ‘and not say a word; but for a long time I shall remember this moment—all my blood stopped, and for an instant my heart ceased beating . . . I sat down at the table deliberately, and still silent. My father realized his mistake, and began to find fault with everything, and in an affected kind of way to scold the servants so as to have an excuse for being irritable.

‘Suddenly he sat down on the arm of my chair, and put his arms round me. I at once freed myself. “Oh, no!” I said . . . “I don’t want to be close to you.”’

“Yes, yes,” coaxed Constantin, and then, in a joking kind of way, “But it’s I who ought to be annoyed.”

“But I am not at all annoyed . . .” retorted his daughter.

At eight o’clock on a Saturday morning in November Marie and her father left Gavronzi. The sixty servants came into the courtyard to see them depart, and Marie gave money to them all, and a gold bracelet to the housekeeper. She and Constantin went first to Poltava for a day or two, and it was there at the station, that she said her final good-bye to her relations. ‘My father,’ she writes, ‘was still fuming. As for me I walked about the station as if I was in my own house. Pacha kept apart watching me all the time.

‘At the last moment it was discovered that a package was missing; a commotion arose like a tempest and everyone ran everywhere. Amalia was trying to excuse herself, I upbraiding her for carelessness. The onlookers listened and were amused; seeing which I redoubled my eloquence in the language of

Dante. What diverted me especially was that the train was waiting for us. That is what is so attractive in this wretched country: one is all-powerful. Alexander, Paul, and Pacha came into the *coupé*; but the third bell announced our departure and people pressed round me.

“Paul, Paul,” said the Green Man, “let me at least say good-bye to her.”

“Let him come nearer,” I said.

He kissed my hand, and I kissed him on the cheek near his eye! That is the Russian custom, but I had never conformed to it.

There was only the whistle to wait for and it was not long in coming.

“Well,” I brought out.

“I’ve still time,” said the Green Man.

The train gave a jolt and slowly began to move, and Pacha started talking very quickly, without knowing what he was saying.

“*Au revoir, au revoir;* now jump down.”

“Yes, good-bye, *au revoir.*”

And he jumped on to the platform after kissing my hand yet once again. The kiss of a faithful and respectful dog.

“Well! well!” called out my father from the *coupé*, for we were in the corridor. I went in to him, but was so overcome at the grief of which I was the cause that I lay down immediately and shut my eyes to think at my ease.

Poor Pacha, dear splendid fellow, if I regret anything in Russia it is this heart of gold, this loyal character, this upright spirit. Am I really upset? Yes. As if one could be indifferent to the natural pride of possessing such a friend.’

During their journey Marie and Constantin got on fairly well together, though by now each knew that the agreeableness of the other was superficial only. Also both of them had, locked up in their mind, a list of complaints against the other. Constantin’s annoyances are only revealed to us by his subsequent behaviour, but of Marie’s we know a good deal. There was, for instance, the money complication over some horses she was taking back to Nice under the escort of Chocolat, now temporarily turned into a groom, and of

Kousma, her father's valet. It is not clear whether these horses were a present from Constantin or whether Marie had bought them. She had, however, given Kousma five hundred roubles for the journey which, with her own railway ticket, left her with nothing but some drafts on Paris. When she told Constantin of her giving Kousma this necessary money he became offended, and, taking a lofty attitude, exclaimed that money meant nothing to him and that considering how much he had already spent during his life any extra payment for his daughter was of no account. But this noble sentiment was all his daughter got. However, outwardly on good terms with each other, they sat together in the railway carriage playing cards and amusing themselves by making fun of the other passengers. But on reaching Vienna, where they stayed the night, a tiff occurred. Constantin took a box at the opera, but insisted that Marie should go in her travelling dress. Marie grew melodramatic. 'You take advantage of my position,' she retorted, 'but I don't allow anyone to give themselves the luxury of tyrannizing over me. I shall not go. Good-night.'

One is not surprised that Constantin was beginning to feel he had had enough of her.

At five o'clock on the morning of 18th November, the train bearing within it these two hostile spirits arrived in Paris. It was far, very far from the triumphant return with her captive in tow that Marie had intended. There, certainly, was her captive in the flesh, but not her captive in spirit: and she knew it. If he thwarted her over small things, if he was so close with his money, was it likely that in the future he would make her happiness his supreme occupation, spend his days signing cheques for her benefit? It seemed most improbable. There was, too, only a slender chance that he would remain several months with his family, so giving them the benefit of a more solid background.

The travellers went to the Grand Hotel where they were to meet Madame Bashkirtseff, and found there a wire from her. Constantin took a suite of rooms on the first floor; and Marie had a bath to fill up the time till the fateful moment of her mother's arrival. 'But,' she writes, 'I felt so desperate that nothing seemed of interest any more.'

Then Madame Bashkirtseff and Dina arrived for this most embarrassing of reunions. Aunt Sophie had been left at Nice: in a situation fine-spun as this it was perhaps felt that Aunt Sophie and her comments were better absent. Marie, who gives us so many situations in detail, unfortunately lets us see this one only in barest outline. She tells us how her mother arrived with Dina. ‘Dina, happy, calm, continuing her work of sister of charity and guardian angel,’ and then she adds, ‘You can well imagine I had never been so embarrassed. Papa and mama! I did not know what to do with myself. There were several jarring moments but nothing too alarming,’ and that is all we are told. In the evening they all dined together and went to a play, Marie sitting in a corner of the box, her eyes so heavy with sleep she could hardly see. That night she and her mother slept together, and, writes Marie, ‘after such a long absence, instead of tender words there only came from my lips a torrent of complaints which moreover soon stopped as I fell asleep.’

It is hardly necessary to say that this family reunion was a reunion in appearance only: beneath the harmony it was a meeting of opposing forces. For a day or two there was a polite pause, and then Madame Bashkirtseff opened up the situation. ‘Mama, who forgets everything to think only of my well-being, talked a long time to my father.’ From Constantin’s own point of view he was in a position of hideous embarrassment. He had taken it calmly enough when Marie had told him at Gavronzi that her mother had ‘ceased to exist, there is only me’, but it was a very different matter when he realized that to live in his daughter’s vicinity he too would have to cease to exist. Be a domestic prisoner he would not. Even to discuss the situation reasonably with a mother blind with devotion, and a daughter blind with immaturity was hopeless. But his wife naturally did not see the situation in the same light. To her mind the sensible thing was for her to put all her cards on the table and for her husband to do the same. Now, as they sat together, down came her cards, but, most annoyingly, her husband concealed his: all she got, as she told Marie afterwards, was evasive flippancy, banter that led nowhere, or else ‘revolting indifference’. However, at the end of this strained interview Constantin did go so far as to say that if Marie really wished for

a father to act as chaperon he would go with them to Rome as they suggested.

'If I could only believe it!' writes Marie.

Somehow they got along together for a few days, mutually avoiding any further attempts to bring the situation to a head. Then, one evening, when they were all in a Russian restaurant, without particularly intending to do so, they found themselves discussing 'most seriously', the burning topic—Marie's future. Madame Bashkirtseff spoke sensibly and to the point, but if she had talked with the tongue of an angel the position from Constantin's point of view could not have been more damnable. Here he was, cornered at last, hemmed in by those six feminine eyes, all fixed on him, searching him, trying to pin him down, to make him their useful possession for ever. 'It was then,' says Marie, 'you should have seen my father! He lowered his eyes, he whistled, and as to replying. . . .'

'There is,' she goes on, 'a dialogue of Little Russia that is characteristic of the nation and that at the same time gives an idea of my father's style.'

First Peasant: We were walking together along the highway.

Second Peasant: Yes, we were.

First Peasant: We found a pelisse.

Second Peasant: We did.

First Peasant: I gave it you.

Second Peasant: You gave it me.

First Peasant: Where is it?

Second Peasant: What?

First Peasant: The pelisse!

Second Peasant: What pelisse?

First Peasant: We were walking along the highway?

Second Peasant: Yes.

First Peasant: We found a pelisse?

Second Peasant: We did.

First Peasant: I gave it you.

Second Peasant: You gave it me . . .

First Peasant: Then where is it?

Second Peasant: What?

First Peasant: The pelisse.

Second Peasant: What pelisse?

#### MARIE CONFRONTS HER FATHER

'And so on eternally. Only as the subject was not remarkably funny for me I felt suffocated, and something rose in my throat that hurt me horribly . . . I asked if I could go back with Dina, leaving Mama and her husband in the Russian restaurant.

'For a whole hour I sat without moving, my lips pressed together . . . knowing neither what I was thinking of nor what was happening round me.'

Then her parents returned: Constantin came up to her, kissed her hair, her face, her hands: 'If the day should come when you really need help or protection,' he assured her, 'say but the word and I will hold out my hand.'

'I gathered up my remaining strength,' says Marie, 'The day has come,' she said, 'where is your hand?'

This was more than Constantin had reckoned on. 'At present,' he said hurriedly, 'you have no need of it. . . .'

'Yes I do need it.'

'No, no,' and he began to talk of other things.

The next day, leaving the women to examine their bruises, he wisely made off, going to join his sisters either on the coast or in Italy.

While in Paris, in addition to the disappointment over Constantin's attitude, Marie had had another. Her throat was so bad that her mother had taken her to a doctor. His report was depressing: chronic laryngitis, for which she must for the present have continual treatment. Panic fell on Marie; with a throat permanently affected, what future hope could there be for her voice?

Two days after Constantin's departure a letter arrived from his valet, Kousma, who, having spent the five hundred roubles given him by Marie had now, from lack of funds, got stuck with the horses in mid-Europe. There was a burst of indignation from Marie, and then she and her mother turned their thoughts to packing up for Nice.

'Friday, December 1st. Yesterday we left Paris. Mama with her thirty-six packages reduced me to despair. Her cries, her fears, her boxes are sickeningly bourgeois. Oh well!'

The next morning Marie awoke in her own home. 'My aunt

herself brought me my coffee; I had several trunks unpacked and for the first time since my journey I became myself.' There was a friendly sweetness in these homecomings, but this sweetness had an underside of bitterness. Like a hood the familiar surroundings, the familiar annoyances, again closed down over her. On the one hand there was the charm of Nice itself. Coming back to it after such a long absence the soft beauty of it all enraptured her: the luminous air, the lizard brilliance of the grass, the moon-lit magnolias when each evening after dining with her family in the pavilion she crossed the garden on her way back to the house. 'This Paradise!' she exclaims. And this long absence had, too, enhanced her feeling for her family; that affection, that good humour, that cosy intimacy which she had always taken as a matter of course now held new value. 'After all, the family really has its attraction! We played cards, laughed, had tea, and I felt pervaded with comfort in the midst of my relations, surrounded by my dear dogs, Victor, with his great black head, Pincio, white as snow, Bagatelle, Prater.... There it all was before me, and at this moment,' she writes, 'I see the old people playing their part, the dogs, the dining-room . . .'—and then, as she describes the scene, on the crest of these sentiments she is submerged in a wave of disgust, of irritation: this pleasant picture, so dear, so tranquil, suddenly presents itself to her in another and equally true light. Its very virtue is its vice. It spells domesticity, stagnation, smug contentment that will never lead to anything different. If she is not careful it will absorb her into itself, and she will end by being nothing more than another family actor in the Babanine dining-room. 'Oh! it oppresses me, suffocates me, I want to escape, I feel as if I were chained down like one is in a nightmare . . . I am not made for this life, I can't bear it! I have such a dread of remaining at Nice that it's sending me out of my mind, I feel that this will be another wasted winter, and that I shall do nothing. . . .'

'General Bikovitz has sent me a great basket of flowers, and in the evening Mama watered them to preserve them . . . these small nothings make me beside myself, this affectation of the bourgeoisie drives me to despair. . . .'

'I came back from the pavilion in an enchanting moonlight

illuminating my roses and my magnolias.... This poor garden that has never given me anything but sad thoughts....'

About the middle of December Constantin reappeared; and now the question arose, could he be persuaded to accompany Marie and her mother to Rome? Their expectation of any social backing from him had diminished to that point that the promise of his accompanying them there on a two days' visit was received with pleasure and without sarcasm. It was after all something that Rome should have even a two days' exhibition of him, something to be able to prove that he was no myth, that Madame Bashkirtseff really had got a husband, and Marie a father.

So off to Rome they set, and, on arriving, got down from their fly at the same hotel in which had taken place the episode Antonelli. Marie went up the well-remembered staircase: here was the very corner against which on that remarkable evening she had leant: she positively could not resist leaning against it now. The strangeness of life! These long filaments stretching out from past incidents so that, though dead, they still lived: these trite objects such as the corner of an hotel staircase that could yet mutely reawaken dormant emotions in the on-looker.

While at Rome an anonymous basket of flowers arrived for Marie. Gazing at the lilies of the valley whitely gleaming against the ivy, she and her mother tried to guess who had sent them. By a process of elimination the probabilities pointed to Antonelli: but the lilies kept their secret, and Marie left without discovering the giver.

Back at Nice she passed into a phase of comparative contentment. 'I have a fever for work.' 'It is only Nice that can be useful to me, I am not dissipated, and I spend my life in scientific and historic research, learning heaps of things I don't know.' But she wrote ruefully 'I have . . . no one to guide me.' All the same, in a certain direction she had help from her grandfather, that lettered old man with whom she would have hour-long discussions over Russian history.

In the midst of these efforts at self-education a small stir came into Marie's life. 'To-day,' she writes on 7th January,

'I have something lovely to tell. In the morning, nothing particular, and then I heard that Gambetta is at Nice, and without hesitating I sent him a letter....

Sir,

No doubt you will not be surprised to hear that you have inspired an intelligent individual with the keenest wish to know and talk to you, therefore, to-morrow, I shall wait in for you all day. *Promenade des Anglais, 55 bis.*

Accept, Sir, the assurance of my profound esteem.

Marie Bashkirtseff.'

Then, brimming with expectation, she awaited results.

Hot on this excitement came another. While she was out walking with her family she met a Russian friend with a certain Monsieur Pierret. Now it was this Monsieur Pierret who had originally spread the reports at Rome against the Bashkirtseffs when they had been there the year before. Unfortunately for him, Marie knew it. An idea leapt to her mind. He too should be asked to the *Promenade des Anglais, 55 bis.*

'Sir,

The importance of what I have to say justifies me, without having the honour of knowing you, in begging you to call to-morrow, Monday, between two and six o'clock, at my house, *Promenade des Anglais, 55 bis.*

Accept, Sir, my best respects,

Marie Bashkirtseff.'

All Monday she sat waiting for Gambetta and Monsieur Pierret. The fact that if they came their visits might coincide in no wise disconcerted her. However, neither one nor the other crossed the doorstep of *55 bis.* On Tuesday she poured her disappointment into her diary. 'I am bruised, annihilated, worse than dead. Death would be a deliverance, I should not welcome it with pleasure.... But it would be an end once for all while, living, I die every day. Yesterday... let me see, yes, yesterday, I waited in for Gambetta and Pierret, neither one nor the other came....'

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However, the next day Monsieur Gustave Pierret, no doubt bewildered, but possibly a shade flattered, by this peculiar invitation, actually did arrive. ‘I had,’ says Marie, ‘put on my best pelisse to intimidate him.’ At three he appeared at the door of the yellow drawing-room where Marie sat waiting. ‘Come in, Monsieur,’ she said, getting up.

‘Madame Bashkirtseff?’ he asked.

‘No, Monsieur, her daughter,’ said Marie in a voice she could not keep from trembling, ‘but my mother not being well I am taking her place.’ She sat down and pointed to a chair for him to sit on. ‘You must, Monsieur,’ she went on, ‘certainly feel rather surprised. . . .’

‘Madame. . . .’

‘Not knowing me. . . .’

‘Actually I have not the honour of knowing you. . . .’

‘What, Monsieur, you don’t know me?’

‘Not at all.’

‘Nor my family?’

‘Nor your family.’

‘And you’ve never seen me?’

‘Yes, I believe I have had that honour . . . once at the theatre.’

‘That makes it still more astonishing, and in a moment you will see why.’

‘But, Madame . . . Madame or Mademoiselle?’

‘Mademoiselle. I am feeling rather embarrassed Monsieur, besides . . . I am going to speak frankly because that is why we are here. . . .’

‘I am all attention, Mademoiselle.’

‘So, Monsieur, once more you persist in saying that you don’t know me, either by sight or by name?’

‘Except for those two times, once at the theatre, and once out walking, yes, Mademoiselle.’

‘Very well, nothing could make the explanation between us easier. As you don’t know us, you could not have said what you have said.’

‘I have said something? But what, Mademoiselle . . . ?’

‘You will understand in a moment. You were out walking one day with someone who bowed to us: “What!” you said, “you know those people?” “Yes,” was the reply. “But,” you

went on, "do you know what they are? They live on other people's money, they haven't a farthing, they never pay anyone."'

'Oh, Mademoiselle!'

"They do in their wretched workpeople. . . . They have nothing but lawsuits, and trouble with the police."

'Oh, Mademoiselle, I said that! It is not possible, I am very careful what I say, and four years ago I had paralysis of the tongue, there were moments when I could not speak at all.'

'It seems that this was not one of those moments. . . . In short, I can depend on the person who repeated this to me as I can on myself, so there cannot be any doubt about it. . . . The thing is to know for certain if you are Monsieur Pierret.'

'Yes, Mademoiselle.'

'You live at *Jardin Public*, number one, with your uncle and aunt?'

'That is quite right.'

'You are a widower?'

'Yes, Mademoiselle, I am a widower . . . yes, a widower.'

'Then it is you.'

'But as I do not know you!'

'That makes it still odder . . . !'

'I have never said anything about your family, as for you, Mademoiselle, I saw you one evening at the Opera in a dress very like this one, and I said you resembled Velleda, that is absolutely all.'

'How strange it is! And I who was prepared to say to you: The voice of the people is the voice of God, but one must not confuse this voice with those of dismissed servants. . . .'

'But I have never had anything to do with the servants. . . .'

'I believe you.'

'My uncle and aunt came to Nice with three servants from Paris and we have never had anything to do with those at Nice.'

'Stranger and stranger, that, denying so positively, you have yet said things so . . . strange. . . . There must most certainly be another Monsieur Pierret, and it is to this other one I should like to say: "How wrong and contemptible it is to run down

people without knowing them . . . !” Then I thought that this Monsieur Pierret hearing me talk so pleasantly and reasonably would be sorry to have spread shocking calumnies about people who are . . . possibly . . . very nice, and who have done him no harm.

“What astonishes me Mademoiselle, is who can have told you this . . . I know hardly anyone here. A Russian, General Wolf, whom I walk with sometimes, and then three Frenchmen—so who can have told you?”

“You understand, Monsieur, that I don’t want to mention any name. All I can tell you is that I can depend on this person as I can on myself. And for the moment, if you agree, we will turn to a subject that specially concerns me.”

“You, Mademoiselle?”

“I, Monsieur; do you know, or used you to know, Cardinal Antonelli?”

Monsieur Pierret made a dash for safety. ‘Never!’ he cried. ‘Nor his family, nor any of his friends? You have never written to him?’

‘Never, Mademoiselle, never!’

‘Oh! how odd it is then; do you know what you said? You said this: “The young girl is charming.”’ Here Monsieur Pierret bowed, murmuring a warm assent, though at the moment he must have felt that this girl confronting him was the most diabolic conceivable.

Marie again took up her thread. ‘“But,” you continued, “she hasn’t a farthing. . . .”’ And you said as well, “I have let the Cardinal know, who, either personally, or through a third person, asked me to . . . make inquiries.”

‘Never, Mademoiselle, never! . . . This is the first I have heard of it!’

‘Well, you must know, Sir, that last winter there was a question of marriage between me and the Cardinal’s nephew, and that I was capricious enough . . . to refuse this advantageous *parti*. A refusal that a good number of people are obstinate enough not to believe. . . . But that is beside the question and, too, I’m entering into unnecessary details, but as at the moment we’re acting a sort of vaudeville we may as well say the most extraordinary things.’

'It's the first time I've heard all this that you do me the honour of telling me.'

'Oh! so much the better Monsieur. It would be repugnant to me to think that a man of honour could do such a vile thing. . . . Well, Monsieur, as it was not you, it only remains for me to ask your forgiveness for having troubled you. But, you understand . . . I thought it better . . . to ask you to come here and to speak openly. . . .'

'Quite true, Mademoiselle. . . .'

'Then Monsieur, forgive me for having troubled you; as for excusing myself for having suspected you, I shall do no such thing seeing that not knowing you at all I had neither the right to suspect you nor any reason for depending on you.'

'Just so, Mademoiselle, as to its being a trouble, I am, on the contrary, very pleased, as it has afforded me the happiness of talking to you.'

Marie did not answer: Monsieur Pierret got up from his chair:

'Mademoiselle.'

'Monsieur.' He went. As he was going out of the door Aunt Sophie came in.

'He looked,' said Aunt Sophie, 'as if he had just had a hot bath.'

Then Marie went off to the skating rink.

One cannot throw a stone into a pond without its causing ever widening circles, and Marie's interview with Pierret had just the same result on Nice society. It was the kind of incident that did her no good, that gave substance to the hostility felt for her.

The next night she went with her family to the opera. 'My white get-up,' she writes, 'had as usual a great likeness . . . to a peasant's chemise, and my hair was carelessly rolled . . . to fall again in two great curls down my back. It was strikingly simple. Not a jewel, not a ribbon except that of the belt . . . clasped in front by a buckle of dull gold. At any other time I should have thought I was being admired. This evening each glance was an insult. And above all those from the women. Oh!' she adds, 'how I loved those who did not look at me!'

It was certainly a detestable evening for, added to Pierret's presence, in one of the boxes opposite the Bashkirtseffs sat a Madame Harris who, with low asides to her friends, pointed at them with her fan. However, as men in the eighteenth century when going into rough company would take a prize-fighter with them to act as brawler in case of a row, so Marie had the advantage of always having at her elbow her aunt to act as social brawler. Now, seeing her niece attacked, Aunt Sophie dashed into the fray, and with counter asides to those of Madame Harris, and with pointed stares through her lorgnettes tried to down her. It was a battle of fan and lorgnette that could have graced the pages of *The Rape of the Lock*. Few could stand up to Aunt Sophie when she put on her grand manner, and before her onslaught the adversary began to redden, to falter . . . in the end it was Aunt Sophie's and not Madame Harris's brow that was wreathed with the laurels of victory.

## 9

After his two days with Marie and her mother at Rome Constantin appears to have gone to stay at San Remo or elsewhere with his sisters. He was edging away sideways from his would-be captors, softening the blow of his intended cut-and-run by remaining for the last few days, if not actually with them, at any rate in their vicinity. For a cut-and-run he had decided it must be. Discussion was useless: explanation was impossible: secretly and without farewell he must escape, disappear, scuttle back to Russia—to his Gavronzi, to his mistresses, to his cannons.

Certainly he had, before leaving his family, made one offer to Marie, an offer that sounded quite well and yet one that he could at the same time be absolutely certain she would refuse: he had suggested that she should live with him permanently at Gavronzi! One imagines that Constantin must have derived a good deal of inner amusement from this suggestion.

While he was at San Remo Marie wrote to him hoping, it

seems, for further concessions of some sort: 'A thousand projects,' she writes, 'a thousand illusions, a thousand desires obsess me, I am waiting for my father's reply.' Two days later she had it. It came in the form of a telegram from her aunt:

'Your father left yesterday for Russia, kisses you, is writing,  
received parcel from Rome.

Princess Eristoff.'

So he had gone! This time really gone! Here was the end, the irrevocable end of all she had hoped from her Russian visit. 'Journey to Russia,' she writes despairingly, 'exhaustion, expense, tears, entreaties, annoyances, boredom in the country, attempts to awaken some paternal tenderness, some human sentiment . . . all has been useless.'

Always before when things had seemed intolerable Marie had had the consolation of a possible visit to Russia at the back of her mind, the trump card that if the worst came to the worst she could play. Well, she had played it and she had lost.

But though cruelly disappointed she did not lose courage. 'I know someone who loves me, understands me, is sorry for me, whose life-long occupation is to make me happier, someone who will do everything possible for me and who will succeed, someone who will never betray me again. . . . And this someone is *myself*. Do not let us expect anything from men . . . but believe firmly in God and our own strength. And, *ma foi*, as we are ambitious, let us justify our ambitions by doing something.'

It was all very well to hang up this manifesto in her mind, but to live up to it was a different matter. At times, remembered disappointment in the past, her impotence to alter the present, despair as to the future—at times these things engulfed her. 'Yesterday evening I had an attack of despair that reduced me to groaning and, finally, to drowning the drawing-room clock in the sea. Dina ran after me fearing some sinister project, but it was nothing but the clock. It was in bronze with a Paul and Virginie. . . . Dina came up to my room. The clock seemed to amuse her a lot, I laughed too. . . .'

It is hardly necessary to be a psychologist to understand why,

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in her present mood she felt irritated at the figures of Paul and Virginie. In addition she was actually far more seriously ill than she or her family realized, and this deep-seated ill-health was probably the fundamental cause of her black hours. But all her hours were not black: far from it.

Sometimes during this winter at Nice in the early evening would be heard a sound of pattering hoofs, and passers-by would see two white ponies, a white basket-carriage and two fair-haired girls in white seated inside it. With lit carriage lamps the whole charming affair would come glimmering out of the dusk: and this pretty toy with its snowdrop girls, and the quick-tapping hoofs of the ponies held a kind of fairy charm that would leave a murmur of pleasure in its wake.

## Chapter Six

### MADRIGAL AT NAPLES

In the early spring of 1877 Marie's throat was worse. 'Oh my throat! Oh my voice . . . ! it is desperate.' Fauvel, her doctor, ordered her further south, and in February she, her mother, and Dina went to Naples.

It was now that there was to come into Marie's life a curious reverberation of the Antonelli affair. This time the background was Naples instead of Rome, and the character of Antonelli was played by another man. When Marie walked into the *Hôtel du Louvre*, there, already waiting for her inside it, was a charming boy ready to antic through his part of prospective husband to any pretty girl rich enough to pay off his debts. This debauched but seductive young man was named Count Lardarel, and when one has added that he always dressed himself to match in colour whatever horse he happened to be riding, further description of him for the moment is unnecessary. Marie had known him by sight at Rome, but his white face that reminded her of a Pierrot's cardboard mask had made no appeal to her. However, now to find him staying in the same hotel as herself stressed her interest, and when she went out, a crowd of Neapolitans whom she did not know formed a background that threw into relief this equestrian figure.

The tentacles of her mind, aimlessly waving, ready for any object to which to attach themselves, fastened on to Lardarel. Very soon he had become to her an object of immense interest. Surreptitiously to spy on his comings and goings in the hotel became the supreme amusement of her days, and in her rôle of amorous detective she would enwrap herself within the folds of a *portière* so as to watch him without being seen. Unknown to Marie, Lardarel was equally intrigued by her, and would spend hours on his knees peering through his keyhole. When dressing he would make his valet—so this

man told Marie's maid—take his place: 'Charles, watch and tell me what happens.' At a sign from his servant Lardarel would shove him aside, fall on his knees and put his own eye to the hole: then, having seen his *inamorata* go by, would jump up and leap about the room, his hands clasped to his head, crying out, '*Ah! Bon Dieu! Ah! Bon Dieu!*' Certainly the boy had charm.

Marie went further than peering through keyholes. 'This morning,' she writes, 'I went into our adorable neighbour's room thinking he wasn't there. I opened the door—three exclamations burst out one after another like the echo in a grotto. I gave a most natural "Ah!" shutting the door noisily. I certainly didn't expect to see anyone. Lardarel, who was looking at himself in the glass, gave a second "Ah!" and the third came from his servant. Ten minutes later Rosalie [her maid] told me that the Count said "this demoiselle is charming". I am enchanted. After having spent an hour looking through the keyhole and listening, I heard him ask for his hat, and flung myself into the corridor....' It only remained for Rosalie to start an affair with Lardarel's valet—which happened almost immediately—and the little *opéra bouffe* was in full swing.

A meeting at a masqued ball where Marie had an evasive conversation with Lardarel further heightened their interest in each other, and then Lardarel went away for ten days or so. Marie and her mother, making a sham excuse, went off to the station and took tickets so as to go in Lardarel's train as far as Cancello. Lardarel, seeing these women whom he did not actually know but wished to know, hesitated whether to get into their carriage. He stood in the doorway, 'one foot raised,' to clamber up, writes Marie, 'an overcoat over his arm, and his eyes so serious, so genuinely interrogatory that it is possible I deliberately prolonged this charming embarrassment... a word would have torn the veil and the spell would have been broken.... Lardarel is extraordinarily like a young sporting dog... smooth skin, long tail, long ears, who comes up wanting to play... and who looks at you in astonishment, one ear pricked... it's striking.'

Lardarel had gone, but he had left a disturbance behind him.

Marie was herself surprised at the way her mind revolved round this absent figure. 'Am I going to fall *in love?*' she asked herself: but no, not with a Lardarel surely! Oh! boredom!' she exclaims, 'what do you not give birth to?' Lardarel was far from that exceptional being which she demanded; here was no Colossus, but all the same there was instinct in him some indefinable quality that so far no man she had known intimately had possessed. What was it? A kind of completeness, a sort of synthesis of personality? 'To be finished, that is something, whatever people may say . . . one is born complete or incomplete. My father, my brother, Peter Antonelli . . . will remain unfinished all their lives, however intelligent and clever they may be. Lardarel is a fool, everyone says so, that does not prevent him from being finished.'

Fool or no fool, Naples for the time was empty of him, and the dreariness of life in an hotel seemed more intolerable just because before it had held that living centre of interest. From a heavy sky rain drove down onto the streets: at the skating rink the Bashkirtseffs found no one they knew, and back in their hotel sitting-room Marie bitterly summed up the situation. 'Above, the ceiling; on four sides the walls; a shaded lamp giving the room an invalid atmosphere, and then Mama, and Dina, and silence. . . . Imagine this life, this torture of Tantalus. I go out, I see the world, and I get nowhere!!! Not a living soul, not a word to anyone who is my equal. Solitude made even more insupportable by an hour or two spent in the streets. "How dull it all is," I cry out for the twentieth time, "and this is how the best years of my life are passing."'

"Oh yes, it is dull," says Mama.'

'That is the first time she hasn't told me that we live in great gaiety and like everyone else; I draw her attention to it, adding that if she had always talked like this we should never have had scenes. And faced with this compliance, and the uselessness of saying anything more—which might perhaps have buoyed me up by giving me a chance of being impertinent—I feel my whole life slipping away, and shed tears without anyone suspecting it. . . . My voice lost, the piano given up,



*Photo Gilletta, Nice.*

MARIE BASHKIRTSEFF

By HERSELF

In the Musée des Beaux Arts, Nice.



#### MADRIGAL AT NAPLES

my painting stopped, as if my whole life were imprisoned in a corset like that of Dina's which stops her circulation. . . . My throat makes me desperate.'

Naturally, in the condition she was in, every hour that Lardarel stayed away added to his attraction. 'It is raining,' runs her entry for Thursday, 23rd February. 'At half-past two I sat down to the piano, I took a *Fileuse* by Litoff, and told myself to play it fifty times, a bagatelle of twelve pages. . . .' 'If you play it,' she told herself, 'you shall have Lardarel, but there must be no interruption.' She did play it fifty times, to the exasperation, one imagines, of her family and everyone within hearing. 'I only got up from my seat at half-past seven, till that moment deaf to questions put to me and to the "dinner is ready". I dined alone, and my hands still hurt, but . . . !' Yes . . . but . . . ! painful fingers were nothing if only that stirrer of life and emotion would come back.

And then, all her megrims are dissolved in a burst of laughter. An Englishman staying in the hotel, and who sat opposite the Bashkirtseffs at meals was immensely and openly attracted by Marie, and always trying, without success, to attract her attention. One evening at *table d'hôte* she heard him confiding in a friend what a *fête* this evening was for him, implying that for several days he had not seen Marie. A ridiculous idea shot into her mind. 'What,' she thought to herself, 'would be the expression on his face and that on the rest of the diners if I suddenly whisked off the tablecloth?' She confided the idea to Dina who began to laugh. The Englishman, watching these two convulsed girls, began, without knowing what the joke was, to laugh too. His friend, just about to drink, glanced at Marie and Dina and exploded into his glass: the absurd infection spread, now one, now another began to giggle, to splutter, finally to collapse with laughter. The fact that none of them knew what they were laughing at made not the least difference, 'at the end of five minutes there was no one at the table capable of controlling himself, everyone went out bursting with laughter, young, old, invalids, Englishmen . . . everyone.'

One day when Marie was having a mandoline lesson she heard that Lardarel had just fought a duel, and had been wounded. She was enchanted. ‘He is wounded! how splendid!’ ‘This duel has immensely added to his charm.’ Such was the reaction of a woman of the ‘seventies to the news of a duel. A man who had fought one was of different value to one who had not: it gave distinction, a *panache*. Shortly after this news Marie had a letter from Lardarel. ‘I could not believe my eyes, and for a quarter of an hour I gave way to the most extraordinary antics, jumping about like a ball, flinging out my arms, suffocating Rosalie who, equally mad, kissed the letter.’ Marie wrote back to Lardarel: her writing table and the floor became littered with scraps of paper on which she had tried to draw him with his ‘*air évapore*’—not an easy thing to bring off successfully as she discovered. Otherwise her time was chiefly spent listening to the recital of various remarks that Lardarel had made to his valet, and that the valet had passed on to Rosalie.

Then one day as the Bashkirtseffs were sitting in the hotel reading-room waiting to go in for the *table d'hôte*, Marie quietly looking through the pages of *Le Figaro*, Lardarel walked in at the door. Even though Marie had known he was back in Naples, so much, during his absence, had her imagination centred on him that now when suddenly he stood there before her, a solid object that took up space, that moved, smiled, spoke, and expected answers, she experienced such an emotional upheaval that act naturally she could not. ‘I was so overcome by surprise that I remained an idiot for the rest of the evening.’ ‘He greeted Mama who held out her hand. He bowed in front of me, I reddened in my *Figaro* and, without knowing what I was doing, for a minute more went on reading.’

‘“Well, Monsieur,” I said at last, “well, Monsieur, you have your arm in a sling . . . you have . . . hurt your arm!”—I was trembling.’

‘“Yes, Mademoiselle, I’ve hurt my arm, but it’s nothing now, it’s over.”

‘“No doubt skating,” suggested Dina.

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“ ‘Oh no, against a door. . . .’ ”

‘At table he put himself opposite me, I who didn’t know where to look . . . I was embarrassed, I wanted to laugh and I felt uncomfortable at Mama’s kindness, for from love of me she can’t hide the tenderness she feels for my favourite. She cut up his roast meat for him, and I heard this peculiar remark: “Mama is very clever, she is used to cutting up meat for her dog.”

‘I ate nothing but an orange that I broke in half, and took refuge in the reading-room where I began playing something on the piano.’ Lardarel and the others followed her. ‘It was such a *bizarre* situation,’ goes on Marie, ‘we are supposed hardly to know each other, and yet every instant a word, a glance made us feel this mysterious *entente* between us.’ To and fro in the stagnant air of the hotel reading-room invisible threads wove between these two a radiant web of delight and desire. As he sat there straddle-legged across his chair, joking, laughing, a tumult ran through Marie . . . his chance remarks, his casual movements held a subtle provocation that made her lose her bearings. Before he had gone away from Naples he had seemed to her a not exceptionally different young man from others, but she knew now that he was altogether different . . . changed into something of most pressing import. . . . ‘I did not recognize him,’ he is ‘*a grand seigneur*, spoilt, capricious, wild, just what I want’.

Simplicity and ingenuousness have their own charm: and sophistication and worldliness have theirs; and on Lardarel’s fine-bred face, pasty, handsome, petulant, enchanting, worldliness had imprinted its most accomplished sonnet. Now, light as feathers flew his remarks—remarks amusing, apropos, witty; but to Marie’s exasperation, instead of being able to play an equally effective part, a rigid, a hideous solemnity had invaded her. There she sat, unable to reply to Lardarel’s delicious nonsense except with these absurdly solemn observations, while at the same time she noticed with bewilderment an uncontrollable trembling that was running through all her limbs.

The next day, going out with her mother, her eyes hunted everywhere for a certain face. They turned into the *rue des*

*Rome.* ‘Everyone in Naples was there, my eyes got tired being forced to look at so many people.’ Other friends came up to them but not Lardarel. She had almost given up hope when suddenly ‘Lardarel took his place at my side, very adroitly edging the others away. He gave his good arm to Mama. We took him back to the hotel in our carriage, leaving the others. Lardarel is extremely intelligent and it makes me realize the stupidity of those I used to think intelligent.’ But, sitting opposite to him in the carriage again this hateful rigidity descended on her.

‘“Whatever is the matter with you, Mademoiselle,” asked Lardarel when they got home, “really, you are in a bad mood to-day. Come, now! What is it?”’

‘I went so piteously red it was disgraceful. “No . . . I don’t know . . . yes . . . I am tired . . . it’s nothing,” and I escaped on to the balcony.’

In the evening Lardarel was with them again at the Toledo: ‘Some charming individual,’ she writes, ‘knocked against his wounded arm that he had pulled out of its sling, he went pale with pain, and I managed miraculously to stop myself rushing across to him to ask if it hurt badly. I had a mad longing to.

‘And later, in our rooms, the pain in his arm made him grimace; again I had to suppress an impulse that was quite without excuse.

‘I recount these small things because this has never happened to me before, neither for myself nor for anyone else, and when Mama used to cry out when she was ill I would go into another room, and was never upset except when she had her bad crises that were dangerous, but for Lardarel . . . it is more than odd, it’s unbelievable . . . I don’t understand it. I am not myself. . . . If it’s the beginning of something serious, so much the better.’ Yes, she was certain she had never felt like this before. There had been her feeling for the Duke—which she now looked on as mere childishness—there had been her feeling for Antonelli, but that had been a milk and water affair compared to this . . . This was . . . no, not a tenderness exactly, but something so overpowering, so conclusive that she could not but think that now, for the first time in her life, she was to know what it

was really to be in love. And this was a thing she very naturally did want to know: most eagerly she longed to undergo this experience which in novels was stressed as the apex of all felicity. Yes that must be it: these peculiar feelings were the beginning....

Into Lardarel's seductive personality, into his impeccable *savoir faire* all his force had run and spent itself: beneath, was little but egoism. He had seduced a child of fifteen, deserted her when she was going to have a baby, and giggled about it. He had spent his life with prostitutes, was always in debt, generally drunk, and had been turned out of several clubs. But as is often the case with men of his type there was one individual for whom he had a real affection, his little girl of twelve, daughter of his present mistress. This woman, la Righi, and a man friend, Melissano, were at present his chief companions.

Madame Bashkirtseff, watching and observing, felt the moment had come for one of those would-be tactful remarks such as mothers give vent to when they are both devoted and apprehensive. 'What a charming man,' she mused out loud, 'only what a pity that la Righi and le Melissano will ruin him. Naturally it would be foolish to consider him, not only . . .' she broke off—then ended confusedly 'but even as an *homme du monde* like all the others'.

Marie and Lardarel were now constantly meeting. There was an evening at the Bashkirtseffs' box at the Opera when Marie, little realizing how strangely it would strike another generation of readers, tells us that drawing a dried fig from her pocket she tore it in two, eating one piece herself and giving the other half of this sticky object to Lardarel, which he ate. Later in the evening he retired into the corner of the box with Madame Bashkirtseff and they had a long talk together. Marie, watching him as he sat there chattering, noticed his air of eager earnestness. When the Bashkirtseffs got home her mother told her what it had all been about. He had been telling her of la Righi and their little girl (this was the first time the Bashkirtseffs had heard of the child), of his own devotion

to her, of how he had already given her 100,000 francs, and how he intended to adopt her. He had, too, discussed with Madame Bashkirtseff la Righi's unfaithfulness, and the difference it had made in his plans: of how, before, the King had wished to do something for him (Lardarel was connected with the Royal family, his sister having married the son of the Countess Mirafiore, now King Victor Emmanuel's morganatic wife) but that he, Lardarel, had not wished for it—but, 'Now,' he had ended, 'Now, it is different.'

Marie had been hardly able to listen to all her mother told her: every other moment she had got up to go, but curiosity, a feeling that she must know the worst had each time made her sit down again. A kind of horror filled her: that in spite of her unfaithfulness Lardarel still loved his mistress—that he had a child by her—that he was determined to adopt this child—that already he had made over to her 100,000 francs—this was the man that she, Marie, with her lofty ideals, was on the verge of falling in love with . . . 'Oh! my God and the Holy Virgin Mary, grant that it is not going to be serious with me. *This* then is what I've chosen—the refuse of a courtesan, of a dancer!!! And he still regrets her. . . . What is this man to me?' Yes, what . . . ? He had become an obsession, and every day he was becoming more so . . . she must at all costs get a hold on herself. 'At present it seems to me I exaggerate.' Yes that is what it was, let her look it in the face. 'I am an exaggerated individual; like a piano strung half a tone too high, it is in tune but it is exaggerated.'

By the end of March the Bashkirtseffs, discovering in Naples now one friend, now another, had had introduced to them quite a number of men, and Marie and Dina went about surrounded by a regular court. Even Dina, that gentle blushing girl, had acquired an admirer, 'Marcuard is paying court to Dina, who has become much prettier.' These men friends of Marie and Dina realized quite well what kind of a fellow Lardarel was, and one of them, Count Doenhoff, thought he would give Marie a hint. 'Not too much of Lardarel!' he one day remarked. But the truth was that she positively could not have too much of Lardarel; he might be the father of an illegitimate child, he might be dissolute and dissipated, but

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all the same he had in him some quality that drew her, some quality that was to her of immense value.

One evening the Bashkirtseffs and Lardarel dined with a Madame Hamontoff, 'Already, near the end of dinner,' writes Marie, 'I noticed with sadness that Lardarel was tipsy.' 'You are drunk . . .' she told him, 'no doubt you realize how loathsome you are . . . I only stay so as to get thoroughly disgusted with you—you understand?' What no doubt he did understand was that she stayed because, drunk or sober, she preferred to be with him rather than with anyone else.

The Bashkirtseffs returned home on foot, and Lardarel came with them. As he and Marie walked along arm in arm she began to sing:

*'Il était un roi de Thulé  
qui jusqu'à la tombe fidèle  
eut en souvenir de sa belle  
une coupe en or ciselé.'*

'And your belle,' she interrupted herself, 'what has she left you?'

'Oh! God, she's left me debts. . . .'

'And?'

'And a little girl.'

'And . . . what?'

'My God, yes, a little girl, I've got a little girl, my little Alexandrine.'

'The tenderness,' writes Marie, 'with which he said *my little Alexandrine* petrified and infuriated me.' She turned on him. 'You have . . . you! Oh! How do you dare tell me! You are mad! Drunk . . .!'

'Yes,' went on Lardarel imperturbably, 'I'm giving her a very special kind of education, she will be a celebrity, she drinks nothing but cognac.'

Marie looked at him: they were going home through a garden, and the night shadows that fell on his face sculptured its fineness. Sadness invaded her.

'Then you are disgusted with me?' he asked.

'All but.'

'And I who adore you . . . I love you . . . you are charming . . . Let me have your hand to kiss. . . .'

'I ended by extending it icily: he kissed it.'

They got back to the hotel. The Bashkirtseffs drank tea: Lardarel drank cognac. Good nights were said in an atmosphere of coldness. Marie left the sitting-room to go to bed, but Lardarel, 'with a rapidity of which he alone is capable overtook me and kissed my hand.'

Alone in her room Marie opened her diary and began to write, to try clearly to set down the situation. But really it was simple enough: nine words and it was done. 'I love him! he is drunk! he is mad! . . . I love him.' Yes, there it was. There was nothing more to be explained or to be said. This drunkard, this worthless adorable drunkard, had come gliding into her life to arouse the emotion she had longed to know. And his coming was a shame and a humiliation.

## 3

At six o'clock the next morning Marie got up and looked out of the window: there stretched the sky, there lay the sea and on it a white dazzle of coming sunshine. Her spirits rose. 'If,' she thought, 'Lardarel isn't a donkey he'll dress and come out with me,' and while herself dressing she at intervals banged a tambourine in the passage outside his door. Going out of her room she met Marcuard: then Lardarel appeared. They all went on to the balcony. In this great wash of morning light, in this great outpour of sunshine, how changed the world seemed from last night's wretched bacchanalia: how changed Lardarel—no longer drunk but, like the day, calm and remade. To see him perfectly sober like this struck Marie as odd; yesterday it had seemed to her 'that he would remain drunk for the rest of his life.'

'Fishermen . . . !' exclaimed Lardarel. 'Let's go and look, Mademoiselle. Are you coming Marcuard?'

'Let's go,' said Marie.

'Oh, it's too far,' protested Marcuard.

'Come along, Mademoiselle,' urged Lardarel. 'Come with

me': and off they went. 'How strange it is to know you,' remarked Marie as they threaded the streets hunting for one that led down to the sea.

'Why strange?'

'And to see you here, in the country, in the morning! I felt you couldn't go anywhere except to race meetings or *cafés*.'

They had arrived at the beach, and Lardarel held out his hand to help her: 'Suppose we go and buy some fish,' he suggested. They climbed into a boat and rowed out towards the fishermen and their nets. Then Dina and Marcuard appeared in another boat and joined up with them. They were all gay and light-hearted as was the morning. Gay too was an expedition to the *Desarto* that they took that day. Everything, that is to say, except the return drive home when all the shining happiness of the morning, all the delicious banter of the afternoon were wiped out by Marie overhearing one of those recurrent whispered conversations between her mother and Lardarel punctured with the ill-omened names, 'la Righi,' 'Alexandrine.' The wretched girl sat there straining her ears and feeling her face grow redder and yet redder.

And Lardarel? To have a girl so full of verve and charm as Marie thrown in with those necessary money-bags was luck indeed. He was delightedly captivated. La Righi was tired of him, and he was soaked in debt: marriage with this little Russian heiress was the obvious course. He had explained to her mother the complication over his daughter: she would pass it on to Marie and something would be arranged: then they would marry. Lardarel was an expert on sex: he knew exactly how to make a woman respond to the masculine within him, and as for this overwrought schoolgirl . . . ! He had merely had to display himself, to let his personality have its run, and there she was, all of a muzz and a shake just as he had intended she should be. It had not been necessary even to put himself out to the point of keeping sober in front of her . . . yes, he would marry her, she would do very well: really, as his mind dwelt on the little creature, at once so virginal and so seductive, so delicious with her alternating solemnity and sparkle, yes, really, he began to feel quite fond of her.

On April the 5th, the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel, arrived at Naples, and the next morning came to the Bashkirtseffs' hotel to pay a visit to the Prince of Prussia.

An idea arose in Marie's mind. Just before Victor Emmanuel was about to come up the stairs she posted herself on them. There he was coming up . . . now he was just upon her. . . .

'Forgive me, Sir, two words!'

'What do you want of me?'

'Absolutely nothing, Sir, except all my life to be able to boast of having spoken to the best and the most amiable King in the world.'

'It's very good of you, thank you very much.'

'That is absolutely all, Sir.'

'Thank you very much. I do not know how to thank you, it is very good of you,' and in his surprised pleasure Victor Emmanuel squeezed her left hand within both of his.

He passed on and was gone, but the picture of herself, Marie Bashkirtseff, having this successful little encounter with King Victor Emmanuel on an hotel staircase still shimmered in her mind. Like a child escaping from a severe nurse and gloating over a few moments' stolen happiness, she had, for this handful of seconds, escaped from malign Destiny—which seemed to her always to treat her so shabbily—and by this daring manœuvre had acquired for herself this exquisite incident. . . . But swiftly, all too swiftly this triumphant emotion began to change: her self-congratulation to waver . . . had she, on the contrary, done something crassly stupid, unspeakably silly? She was back now in the sitting-room, and Count Doenhoff, who happened to be there, had shut the door to prevent her when the King came down from again waylaying him. So this was how her behaviour struck other people! As she thought it over the incident began to take on the same complexion as the affair Monsieur Pierret—an attempt on her part to come out of her corner and impose herself, to be the unique Marie Bashkirtseff triumphantly in action: apparent success, then a recoil, and the realization that she had made a complete fool of herself. 'I never in my life felt so frightened. In one hour I lived two years. How lucky everyone is who has not spoken to the King!'

Marie's longing for Lardarel was becoming an obsession: Those little mannerisms of his! The way, when he was up against any difficulty, he would cling to his head with both hands crying out, '*Ah, mon Empereur!*' : the way, the absurd but enchanting way he had of kicking out his foot . . . it was nothing and yet it was everything—the man seemed to make her whole being go up in a flame. . . . She was tortured now by the sense of his escaping her, of his being drawn away from her back to la Righi, to the little Alexandrine, to a Madame Piccolelys with whom he was now often seen about. Not realizing that he wanted to marry her, Marie felt it would be far better for her if he should die: if only, for instance, he could have a fatal fall from his horse when riding in the races at Rome! Then no other woman would have him; then she, Marie, could be at peace.

The Babanine family, as we have already seen, had peculiar methods of arranging affairs when they were not to their liking; would hatch strange plots with which to circumvent destiny. And now a childish, a frenzied scheme arose in Marie's mind. But as coadjutor she must have the Almighty himself: he must be made to see the situation in its true light; he must, he should help her. Up to the courts of Heaven rose her prayer. 'O God, it is not from wickedness that I offer up these prayers but from profound grief and love.'

'Make him have a fall and be seriously hurt, let him break an arm or a leg so that he has to go to bed for four weeks. In the name of the tears that for two long hours have choked me, for once take pity on me. . . . Make him have a fall so that I can keep watch at his door like a dog, serve him on my knees like a sick nurse, and if he should die I too should die from joy.'

'O my God I give you five years of my life for him to have a fall from his horse. You who read to the bottom of hearts know that this wish is holy.'

The afternoon of the races came, and Marie got ready. Dressed in white and green with a black velvet hat—Lardarel's racing colours—she set off with her family for the race course at Rome. 'On leaving Toledo,' she writes, 'I shut my eyes making a vow not to open them till we got to the *Champ de*

*Mars* so as to ensure his having a fall. "Make him fall" I repeated to myself in a low voice the whole way. I was very afraid an exclamation from one of the others would make me open my eyes. . . . Make him fall!

She only opened her eyes when they arrived, and the first thing she saw was Lardarel in a fly with a friend driving towards them. There was a crowd that, like a mass of insects, swarmed everywhere, 'over the wheels, nearly over the horses.' From Marie's diary rises the same race meeting scene that we see on the canvasses of Monet, scenes in which pouter-breasted Parisian women of the 'seventies, plumed, flounced, and furbelowed fill the foreground; while the horses, racing in the distance, are painted in so lightly and perfunctorily that they seem more like a dream passing through the minds of these women than something which is actually happening. At this Rome race meeting Marie was given some flowers, and she put violets into the buttonholes of all the men round her that she knew. This was the fashion of the time. A girl going to a dance would take a fan of leaves with a spray of lilies of the valley attached, and if she was popular the whole thing would disappear in a few minutes, little bits of it being begged by her men friends for buttonholes.

Some man, whom Marie refers to as *le Baron*, and who had been introduced to her several days before, came up to speak to her. Far from keeping to herself her wish regarding Lardarel she remarked to this man: 'If I want Lardarel to have a fall it's from philanthropy, I only have to want a thing for it not to happen.'

'Oh! not always,' he said, 'You wanted to know the King and you have got to know him.'

'Know him? No, Monsieur.'

'Yes, you have spoken to him.'

'Yes, I happened to be on the staircase, I greeted him, and if His Majesty was pleased to honour me by a special greeting that, unhappily, does not mean that I know the King.' Considering the circumstances she could hardly have put it better!

The races began. Everyone was talking of Lardarel. 'This,' says Marie, 'made me feel at the same time both pleased and

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jealous.' Now he was riding . . . ! Her eyes followed him . . . he was in front . . . no, he was no longer in front . . . he was dropping behind . . . Marie turned to speak to a friend, and suddenly there was a wild waving of arms . . . a voice cried out: 'Lardarel is on the ground!' ('Then, my God, you have heard me!') But she found that all that had happened was that Lardarel, finding his horse lamed, had purposely jumped down from the saddle.

The races went on. All at once a terrific excitement broke out, the air was torn with screams, a movement swept through the crowd and, like a wave, a mass of people surged towards the paddock. A man, one of the riders, was being carried along through the packed crowd: 'It was Lardarel' writes Marie, 'he had fainted, a horse had kicked him in the chest.'

'Mama, keep calm, people are noticing us,' she said in Russian, and she experienced the curious sensation of blood draining from the face. 'It's not to be wondered at,' said a woman close to the Bashkirtseffs, 'he was dead drunk.'

'It's not true,' said Marie to the man with her, 'it's not true, I spoke to him as he was mounting . . . do go and see what's the matter and come and tell me.'

The invisible prone figure was like a magnet which drew to itself running figures from every part of the course: doctors, gentlemen-in-waiting who had come with the King, people of every description—all came scurrying. Victor Emmanuel himself came and looked over the railing of his stand. Behind him, disregarded, the course was again sprinkled with horses. The Bashkirtseffs' friend came back.

'Well, Monsieur?'

'Oh! Mademoiselle, poor Lardarel is dead!'

'Well,' said Marie calmly, 'if he is dead they will bury him.'

'But he is dead, really dead!' expostulated her friend.

'.... someone said it was not Lardarel,' protested Princess Gerace who was close by, 'it is Francesco.'

'Francesco!'

So it was not Lardarel! 'It was a disappointment,' goes on Marie. 'Really it's stupid of me to think that anything pleasant can ever happen to me. .... He belongs neither to me nor to anyone.'

Marie's handshake with the King was not to be without its sequel. As the Bashkirtseffs, coming back from the races, passed through their hall they found waiting there an unknown man, obviously a gentleman. Rosalie came running. 'Come quick,' she said. ('For an instant,' says Marie, 'I hoped Lardarel was dying.') 'What is the matter?' she asked.

'It's the King's aide-de-camp, he's already been three times: he's come from the King to apologize.'

The next moment Marie and the aide-de-camp were comforting each other in the drawing-room.

'Mademoiselle,' he began, 'I come from the King who has especially sent me to express all the regret he feels for what may have been disagreeable to you yesterday. His Majesty knows that you have been reprimanded by *Madame votre mère* who perhaps thought the King had been upset. Far from it, the King is enchanted, he's done nothing but talk of it, and in the evening he called me up to him and said: "Go and tell this young lady that I thank her for her courteous action; tell her that her charming thought and generous impulse have touched me very much, that I thank her and all her family. Far from being annoyed I am enchanted, tell her mama so, say I shall always remember it." The King knows you . . . that you are a foreigner, it's just because of that that he is so touched. . . .'

'I had,' says Marie, 'interrupted him ten times and finally I overflowed in a torrent of gratitude. . . .' Her mother had as a joke pretended that she had been shut up for twenty-four hours in punishment: this had reached the ears of the King, hence his concern.

'I should,' Marie told the aide-de-camp, 'be in despair if the King had felt the least annoyance at what I had done. . . . Perhaps my brusqueness may have alarmed him. . . .'

'His Majesty,' replied this angelic messenger, 'is never alarmed when it's a question of a *bella ragazza*, and I repeat in the King's name, these are his words, I add nothing, that far from being put out, he is enchanted, delighted, grateful. . . . You gave him extreme pleasure. The King noticed you last year at Rome and at the Naples Carnival . . . and the King was very annoyed with Count Doenhoff, whose name he himself

noted, who said something to you and stopped your being there when the King went out.'

Marie's diary that night could hardly contain her satisfaction and joy. For this once, realization had outrun hope. 'Sound the trumpets!' Further, she gleaned from Rosalie that the aide-de-camp had asked all sorts of questions about her, and had seemed especially pleased at hearing that Lardarel was her friend—'for,' writes Marie, 'His Majesty is devoted to him.'

The next morning the tension Marie had gone through at the races and her turmoil of mind over Lardarel had made her so physically ill that her family thought she had got typhus. They sent for a doctor, an old German. Looking down at her flushed face he asked her what was the matter.

'I don't know, I feel ill, especially my head....'

'You feel?....'

'My brain feels *détraqué*.'

'*Détraqué*? That's a French expression I don't understand....'

'*Détraqué*, moments when I feel I'm off my head.'

The case was beyond the doctor. He assured her she had not got typhus, made such appropriate observations as he could call to mind, and left the hotel bewildered. ('It's not he who can calm me,' observed Marie to her diary.)

In the afternoon she felt better and got up. Lardarel came to see them. At first Madame Bashkirtseff and Dina were there: then they went out leaving the other two. Marie was sitting with her back to a window, the light from it falling on her white dress, on her straw hat with its sprays of white lilac and green leaves. Lardarel, who had gone out of the room with the others, came back followed by Rosalie. Marie made a sign to her maid to leave them. 'I have forgotten my cigar case,' explained Lardarel.

'Where can it be?' said Marie, and then, 'you've found it?' she added.

'Yes, Mademoiselle, I have... well, Mademoiselle,' he went on, 'as you refuse to adopt... my daughter I must say goodbye to you....'

'I looked at him,' says Marie 'in astonishment.'

'Yes, I wanted particularly to say good-bye, to have the happiness of once more clasping your hand before going away, since that is my destiny . . . but you can be certain I shall never marry anyone else. I love you very much but, too, I love . . . my daughter! I wanted, Mademoiselle, in marrying you, to give her a position in life, as I love you we could be . . . or I could be, so happy! . . .'

'Then, Monsieur, what have you got to say to me?'

'Nothing else, Mademoiselle. . . .'

'Sit down,' said Marie, 'and try to explain yourself.'

'It's a question of this . . . child,' began Lardarel, walking up and down in front of her. 'You remember that walk when, perhaps, I struck you as being ridiculous. . . .'

'You, Monsieur, never . . .'

'Well, there it is, I want to explain my behaviour . . . I had the impression you cared for me and that . . . well . . . in marrying me you would be content to . . . adopt . . .'

'Monsieur, in the name of heaven!'

Marie had got up herself. In their mutual embarrassment they had worked round to a table near the door on which that morning had been placed, no one knew why, an immense pearl-embroidered turban of red satin. As they talked, their hands took refuge in this peculiar object, twisting it this way and that . . . 'Oh! Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle,' expostulated Lardarel, 'I had thought, but . . . well . . . you will keep your kind feeling for me, won't you?'

'No, no!' 'I listened,' says Marie, 'hardly grasping what he meant. . . .'

'Give me your hand to kiss. Oh! yes, do, do.'

'Good-bye,' said Marie.

'No, no, *au revoir!*'

'Good-bye,' and she went out of the room. But hardly had she got into her bedroom when she felt an overpowering longing to see him again. 'Rosalie, Rosalie, go and ask Monsieur le Comte to come back for an instant, quick!'

Lardarel came back into the sitting-room. A polite coldness enwrapped him. 'You wish to speak to me Mademoiselle?'

'Yes, Monsieur . . . I'm so dumbfounded at what you've told

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me that I can hardly understand it, in fact I don't understand it.... Tell me, do I really give the impression of wanting to marry you at all costs by accepting your conditions?"

"Oh no, I swear to you, you don't."

"Listen, I can't get over my astonishment, why did you tell me all this?"

"I am frank.... Never would I pay court to a young lady without having the intention of marrying her...."

"Monsieur, Monsieur, who asks you to pay court to me? You bewilder me!"

"Nobody! But it is what I have done!.... I like to be quite straight, that's why I've talked it all over with you."

"Yes."

"So I'm going away—in three days. I shall be back.... I hope I shall still find you here...."

"Probably."

"Your hand."

She gave it him. He kissed it, and was gone.

Marie went on to the balcony. Below her she saw Lardarel get into a fly and drive away. For over an hour she sat there with that incapacity for movement that certain mental suffering brings with it. Automatically her eyes watched the afternoon life of the street below. Carriages were driving along: now and then some man whom she knew would as he passed by glance up and bow to this motionless white figure, little guessing the turmoil of suffering behind the young face shadowed by the sprays of lilac.

At last she saw her mother and Dina coming back. She went downstairs to meet them. 'I've just had someone in for a visit—a remarkable visit.'

"Agreeable?"

"Oh! *mon Empereur*, no!"

'Lardarel does what he likes with me,' Marie a few days back, had written in her diary. And it was true. He had made her lose her centre completely, and find it again she could not. For once she failed to keep her unhappiness to herself. Shamelessly she wept in front of Dina, of her mother, of Rosalie.... This then was what it was to be in love—this rending sensa-

tion that drew off into itself every other valuation in life. She could at least bitterly assure herself that she was now actually undergoing this much vaunted, this widely advertised emotion. 'This then is love? . . . good, very good. Here I am then. I am in love! . . . But adopt his daughter. . . . No!'

Madame Bashkirtseff, distraught at Marie's tears, cried almost as much as she did, and when, the day after Lardarel's visit, some friends were let in by mistake, the two women were forced to account for their reddened eyes and soaked handkerchiefs by saying that they had had bad news from Russia: Constantin, so they explained, was ill.

What stunned Marie was the abrupt cessation of the episode. 'Yesterday he brought the photographs of Sorrente, and to-day he is dead.' But he was far from dead. At the moment he was at Rome. 'If you knew how I follow him step by step. I shut my eyes and I follow him. . . .' This torture of suffering was becoming intolerable. Turning in her mind in every direction to find some way of escape, she could find only one: to kill herself. Very well then, she would do it. At three o'clock in the morning, her chest uncovered, she went and stood on the balcony. On her warm body the night air struck chill, then cold . . . colder . . . colder yet . . . she stayed there till her teeth chattered. . . . The next day she had not even caught a cold.

If only people would not talk of him: if only things would not happen like Rosalie coming into her room with his card on which he had scrawled 'P. P. C.' And that book she had picked up forgetting she had marked her place with one of Lardarel's handkerchiefs . . . now, as she opened it, the scent he always used rose out of it.

'I can't get my bearings . . . I still can't believe it . . . perhaps it's nothing but a dream. Further, I don't yet quite understand what I've done, what has been said to me . . . What is curious is that I'm perfectly well, and up and about . . . I am sensible, calm, I talk of everything, I laugh . . . I should like to explain what I feel, and don't know how to.' '*I love him!*' But adopt his daughter!!! No.'

In her diary Marie never cooks her emotions so as to make them appear consistent. She had, so she believed, experienced

*la grande passion*, or something very near it, and few people in her place could have resisted painting themselves as a tragic figure, to be only, with careful shading and stippling, gradually vignetted back into the normal. For to give full belief to a violent emotion that terminates with almost ridiculous abruptness is a strain on the sympathy of the onlooker. But false shading and stippling were not for Marie. 'Since yesterday,' she writes on the Wednesday after that fatal Sunday, 'since four o'clock in the morning I have been remade, it's like a change in the weather, I sang as I dressed, very happy about everything, and we went to the Beaux Arts Exhibition.' For suffering, if violent enough, has one virtue: when it has done its worst, reached its summit, reaction sets in. The machinery of the mind reverses: the victim has a blessed sense of respite, even, compared to what he has just been through, a sense of happiness.

Now that Marcuard knew the affair was over he could not resist running down Lardarel, possibly in the hope of shifting the limelight a little on to himself. 'When one is in debt for two million,' so he told Marie, 'one makes a reputation for elegance or extravagance. One has the finest horses, the most beautiful mistresses. Well, with all that Lardarel has always cut a poor figure.'

'Run him down, Marcuard,' scoffs Marie in her diary, 'you will do no good. You will always remain an illustrious descendant of William Tell, very well behaved, very correct, very charming, a connoisseur of china, etc., etc.'

About the middle of April Lardarel reappeared. Marie saw him one evening at the skating rink 'quite changed, pale, thin, shirt faded, coat badly brushed . . . drunk again.' They talked quite naturally: 'We are the best friends in the world, I laugh in his face as I do to Melissano.' A rumour went round that Lardarel had gone to the King to ask his permission to join the Russian army. To Marie, Lardarel's importance had suffered a diminishment, but this threatened departure enhanced him: again he began to trouble her mind, 'I want to go away, and I shall forget,' she wrote the evening she heard this news, 'it's only an illness, I am unnerved, that's all. I myself don't

know what it is, I've deceived myself so many times.' 'Well,' she wrote the next day, 'it is over, I want it to be over . . . as for vice, folly, social position, behaviour, he is a being apart, therefore I have for him a feeling apart.'

But without Lardarel how the hours dragged! And the evenings, the nights when they did not go out, and no one came in! 'Oh, these long, long nights at Naples! this lamp-shade with the views of Rome, and these cards that I interrogate and that tell me nothing.'

One day Marie had as usual sat down with her family to the hotel dinner at half-past six; 'You will understand my astonishment,' she writes, 'when we had got to the fish to see Lardarel appear, seat himself at my mother's side and engage her in an amiable conversation in which we hardly took part . . . I went red. Never has this man seen me when I am natural. He was friendly with Mama, paid court jokingly to Dina, and was all but rude to me. We had coffee in our own rooms, and he brought in his letters which he read and let us read.' She might go red and feel embarrassed when she saw Lardarel, but gradually she was escaping from his net, gradually getting back possession of herself. 'I am happy,' she writes very early one morning at the end of April, 'I am happy because . . . I don't know why! It is fine, it is the morning, it is spring! Oh! Naples! how I love you, the Villa Reale seems like a pavilion *en fête* prepared for a king. This palm tree and these kiosks to the right are like the scenery in a theatre standing out against the nebulous background of the hills. I should like this morning to last for ever; the afternoon will come, the world, walks, black moods! I am not expecting anything agreeable for myself, that's the reason I am not anxious to go forward.'

The day arrived when they were to leave Naples. 'It wasn't till the moment came to go that I felt a shade of regret for the striped *portières* and the whole hotel that is so closely bound up with what enlivened my stay at Naples.'

'With what enlivened my stay at Naples?' To such proportions had all that tornado of emotion shrunk. She herself had now no illusions about it. 'No, even that was not the great event

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I have always pictured to myself. Don't let's talk any more about it . . . this love affair has been spoilt, it doesn't exist any longer.' And later she writes, 'One learns what to do if the same thing happens again, but that doesn't help because nothing repeats itself.' An observation at once true and not true.

Marie left Naples, so she writes, in a 'maroon coloured dress shaped to the figure with Egyptian galoon, black boots and gloves, and a man's hat of black felt. At my side a purse of yellow leather'.

The Bashkirtseffs were going to Florence, and leaving Naples at nine in the morning, in an hour they were at Caserte, where they got out, left Rosalie and the luggage, and went to spend the day in the *Parc de Caserte*. Here some of Marie and Dina's young men from Naples joined them and in the soft April air, backed by this 'Italian Versailles', they had a charming picnic. 'Luncheon was extremely gay, one felt every one was enjoying themselves, nothing strained, nothing awkward. I told stories that ended in explosions of laughter, made more violent still by Melissano eating macaroni à la Napolitaine. In a word it was amusing, gay, charming, mad, like parties ought to be in the country, a fairy country like the *Parc de Caserte*. . . . The little lake shrouded with foliage, with the crouching Venus rising up out of those velvet-like plants is a dream of beauty.'

Late in the afternoon they went back to the station. The train arrived: the Bashkirtseffs clambered in. The young men crowded round the window.

'Don't die in our absence!'

'Come back again!'

'Prince, don't get too fat from joy!'

'He's thinner already!'

'He eats too little!'

Good-byes; promises to write; laughter . . . the train began to move.

Naples: Lardarel: King Victor Emmanuel: already they had become merely past episodes written down within the pages of Marie's diary.

Marie was back at Nice. Aunt Sophie had met them at the station with surprising news: a week ago old Monsieur Babanine had had an operation on his eye, and for the time had to remain in a dark room. When the Naples party arrived at the house they found it all rearranged round the grandfather: Walitsky using the dining-room as his bedroom, and the governess of some friends sleeping in Madame Bashkirtseff's bedroom so as to act as nurse to the invalid. Princess Eristoff and a Madame Kondaroff were staying there too to keep Aunt Sophie company.

Marie was happy to be back, rearranging her room, wandering in the garden. It was May: the sun blazed: the future lay before her. At times she would reread her diary, which, since she left Nice in February, had certainly received some pungent pages. But this diary gave her anxiety. 'The idea that my diary will not be interesting . . . torments me.' And then her style: she was so anxious it should be really good: but was it? 'I should be so annoyed if it was thought that I write *Oh's* and *Ah's* from affectation . . . I want to change, I want to write very simply . . . listen to this: since Naples, that's to say since my journey to Russia, I've already tried to correct myself and it seems to me a shade better. I want to say things quite naturally, and if I add some metaphors don't think it's for ornament, oh! no, it's simply to explain as perfectly as possible the confusion of my ideas . . . I do so want to make people feel what I feel! I weep, and I say that I *weep*. But that's not what I want, I want to pass on the whole thing . . . in fact to sadden people!'

Now that the disappointment over Russia and the emotional upheaval over Lardarel had died down she had to reconsider and recast her future. Here she was, wandering again along these familiar garden paths, and where, as far as success was concerned, had she got to? What, with all this effort, all this expenditure of emotion, had she accomplished? 'I try to calm myself by thinking that this winter for certain I'll set to work. But my seventeen years make me redden up to my ears: nearly

seventeen, and what have I done? Nothing . . . it annihilates me.'

'Once more she plunged into self-education: reading, painting, mandoline, languages, piano: again the days were happily whirling by, positively there hardly seemed time to fit everything in. Two hours a day now she spent sitting with her grandfather in his darkened room. 'Oh, when I think that one only lives once, and that each minute brings us nearer death, I feel frantic!! I don't fear death, but life is so short that to waste it is a crime.' For the moment a delicious contentment enwrapped her. 'Oh, what a lovely time youth is! How happily I shall look back on these days of study, of art! One forgets everything else, thinks only of what one is doing': Yes, so far, work was the best formula for happiness she had found.

There was an arrangement that later in the summer the Bashkirtseffs should go to Paris, whether for Marie to have treatment or to study painting is not clear. But for the moment Nice gave her all she wanted. 'To go and live in Paris . . . in the north, after this beautiful sun, these nights so pure and so soft.' The thought was unbearable. But however fair the present, the future had to be kept in mind. Her voice had gone: that, her chief asset, had failed her completely. Now too, occasionally, her sight seemed odd: at times there was certainly something peculiar about it. 'It worries me. Suppose, after losing my voice, I were forced to give up drawing and reading!' Then there was her family to be reckoned with. Once she and they had been homogeneous, she had uncritically and most happily been one with them, but now she had developed to the point of being able to look at them with the eye of an outsider, and, devoted at heart to them as she still was, she realized, regarded from a worldly standpoint, their futility, their total incompetence to help her along her chosen path. They could act as a sympathetic background, as an eagerly applauding *claque*, but that was all. Taken singly, there was no force, no power in them. There was her mother, harebrained and devoted, as loveable as she was irritating, as irritating as she was loveable: there was her grandfather, a charming, a cultured man, but an old man at the end of his tether living in a darkened room: there was Aunt Sophie—Aunt Sophie who had this

curious gift of imposing herself, but, like so many people who have that knack, possessing nothing behind it: there was Dina —Dina the gentle, the blushing, essentially the type that is loved by the few and ignored by the many; there was Paul the countryman, settled down at Gavronzi for life: there was Walitsky, an anchor, a faithful standby, but no man of the world, no pioneer in the complexities of existence as they appeared to Marie. There they were, all these dear, familiar people, aimlessly and happily paddling in the shallows of life, content with that, incapable of anything else.... No, in her path of ambition she could hope for no help but what she could draw out of herself. 'I have no one but myself,' she wrote; 'I shall arrive.'

As for the Lardarel episode: 'I wonder,' she writes, 'what made me think I was in love with this man... I hunt about for something that... he had in him... stronger than myself. Something that drew me... pleased me.... Why? I don't know, but something did draw me; I want to prove that this something did exist, for then... all is explained. I want in fact to find something that will show that it was neither money, nor boredom... nor a desire for conquest.' She gropes about in her mind, pondering on those strange, those overpowering emotions that at a glance from this man had, like some fantastic plant, sprung to life within her. No... it was beyond her: this episode so violent while it lasted, now entirely non-existent. 'At the present moment,' she sums up, 'you quite understand it is over but, at the time, it did happen.'

Looking back at the past incidents of her seventeen years as set down in her diary she adds an explanatory footnote. 'The woman who writes, and the one whom I decry, make two. What effect on *me* have all these tribulations? I register, I analyse, I transcribe my daily personal life, but to *me*, to *I myself*, all that is quite indifferent. It is my pride, my self-love, my interests, my skin, my eyes that suffer, that weep, that rejoice; but *myself*, I am not there except to watch, to write, to recount, and coldly reason on all my worst miseries, like Gulliver must have looked at his Lilliputians.'

It is not only few of mankind at seventeen but few at seventy whose spiritual vision is as clear as this.

'Illness, death, separation, cruelty of love,' writes Marie

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another day, 'all those are agreeable griefs and rendings. One weeps, cries out, tears one's hair, but in the end one gets accustomed to them.

'I speak for myself.

'That which is insupportable is wounded self-love!!'

'Would you like to know the truth? . . .' goes on Marie, 'I love no one and I never shall love anyone unless they agreeably flatter my self-love . . . my vanity.'

Such complete honesty seems almost exoneration.

### 5

In July the Bashkirtseffs went to Paris, and there Marie's new-found contentment vanished. The serenity of Nice had acted as a mirror in which she could look at herself with a certain amount of satisfaction, but Paris with its exciting urgency, its atmosphere of competition, its exquisitely finished women, mirrored her back merely as an unimportant little schoolgirl pegging away at self-improvement. Here was a new type of mortification to endure. Her eyes, too, were opened to degrees of luxury hitherto unknown to her. 'I spent the day looking at real marvels of antique embroideries . . . at dresses that are poems. . . . Every kind of magnificence that has given me a glimpse of luxury I had barely imagined. And this luxury not of the demi-monde but of society.' Happening, too, one day to read what Madame de Staël had said of foreigners' imitation of French wit, she began to suspect that her own was not so scintillating as she had imagined. Everything in fact for the moment was unsatisfactory. 'Reading, drawing, music,' she yawns, 'but boredom, boredom, boredom!' Besides one's occupations . . . one needs something living . . . I am bored because my life is all in a muddle, and because I am bored!

'Paris kills me, it is a *café*, a well run hotel, a bazaar. Oh well, one must hope that with the winter, the opera, the Bois, my work, I shall get used to it.'

Always, too, at the back of her mind was the fear of dying before she had accomplished something, made her mark. To do

that seemed to her a disgrace: 'To die, *mon Dieu*, to die!!!... Without having left anything behind me? To die like a dog!! As 100,000 women have died whose names are barely engraved on their tomb! To die like ...'

'What is life without a circle round one, what can one do when one is always alone? It makes me hate the whole world, my family, hate myself, blaspheme! To live, to live! ... O God, help me!'

To the onlooker her grief may appear puerile, but to an archangel there is probably no difference between the mortified vanity of a schoolgirl and the disgruntlement of a minister out of office, for all suffering is fundamentally similar, all acts as the crucible in which the spirit of man is tormented to finer issues.

Realizing that if she wished to succeed in life she must strike out on some definite line, Marie now decided to devote herself to painting, devote herself to it completely and see if by that she could possibly make a name. 'But if one devotes oneself to art one has to go to Italy! ... to Rome. This wall of granite against which I bash my head every instant!'

She could not go to Rome for her doctors were sending her to Schlagenbad. Her ill health had now become a factor that had to be perpetually reckoned with. Walitsky, himself a clever physician, would give her advice as to whom to go to, and she had the annoying sensation of being on the end of a string which first one doctor and then another would pull, depositing her in places to which she had no wish to go. So now to Schlagenbad she and her family went. 'I was at Schlagenbad two years ago. What a difference! Then I had every hope; now none. Uncle Etienne is with us as he was then, and with a parrot as he had two years back. The same crossing over the Rhine; the same vineyards, the same nuns, castles, old legendary towers....' However, within her mind one small flame of hope did burn. 'Art! If I did not see these three magical letters in the distance....'

In September, back in Paris, Marie summed up her resolution in an italicized paragraph, 'I have decided to remain in Paris where I shall study.... All my whims are over and done with. Russia was a failure and I am properly punished ... I feel the

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moment has at last come to pull myself up. With my disposition, in two years I shall have made up for lost time.

'So, then, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and may divine protection be with me. This is not an ephemeral decision like so many others, but definite.'

After such an invocation it was galling to hear her mother casually referring to this resolution merely as her daughter's 'wish 'to have lessons in painting'.

## Chapter Seven

### AT JULIEN'S

On 2nd October the Bashkirtseffs moved into *71 Champs Elysées*. For a big family to settle into a new house always means a certain amount of confusion: for the Bashkirtseffs it must have meant chaos. Marie perhaps purposely chose that day as the one on which seriously to start her career as an artist, and early that morning set off for the studio, known as 'Julien's'. Adolphe Julien was a middle-aged man, a Marseillaise who had started his career as painting master in a studio empty but for one hunch-back pupil. Escaping failure by a hair's breadth Julien had reached success. Paris restaurants had given rotundity to his figure, and though his accent still betrayed the provincial, in appearance he was the carefully adjusted Parisian, his pale fat face brought nearly to a point by a little black beard. We have two mirrors in which to see Adolphe Julien; that of Marie and that of George Moore, who a few years earlier, a ginger-haired boy newly arrived in Paris with his valet, had attended Julien's classes. In Marie's mirror we see the painting master as a shrewd capable fellow full of warm kindness but essentially ordinary, essentially the business artist. George Moore's mirror gives a different reflection. To him Julien acted as cicerone to the less reputable side of Paris, and in a *café* in the *Passage des Panoramas* would sit the Frenchman and the Irish boy discussing the amourettes of the other students.

Julien now ran a special studio for women in the *Passage des Panoramas*: actually an attic under the leads, an attic made draughty by an outside staircase that came up into it. Julien's group of girl students were poor, hard working, serious; most of them arriving at the studio each morning at eight o'clock after trailing across half Paris in omnibus or on foot. It is easy to imagine the startling impression Marie must have made when, on this October morning, she suddenly appeared at the

top of the little staircase. She was enwrapped in furs, Pincio, her white dog, surged in with her, and behind Marie's blonde face was seen Chocolat's black one. He was in livery, and carried her easel and paintbox. Rosalie completed the group, and remained, so it seems, to act as chaperon.

Julien introduced the newcomer: 'Mademoiselle Bashkirtseff who is coming to work with us.'

'Oh! *la Russe!*' cried the students, 'good morning *la Russe!*' and one of them noticed the shade of annoyance that crossed her face at this democratic greeting.

Julien naturally did not know that Marie had arrived in his studio like a storm-exhausted petrel taking refuge. He, on his part, was delighted to have her: the more of the daughters of the *Champs Élysées* who turned into the gloomy *Passage des Panoramas* and climbed his draughty staircase the better for him. But he soon found another reason for satisfaction. He realized that this new pupil had exceptional talent: talent, let it be said, as understood in the *Passage des Panoramas*. The second day he came and stood by Marie's easel.

'You have done that by yourself?' he asked.

'Yes, Monsieur.' ('I was,' says Marie, 'as red as if I'd told him a lie.')

'Well . . . I am very satisfied, very.'

'Yes?'

'Very satisfied.' And the next day Julien went further. 'You needn't worry,' he assured her, 'you'll get along very quickly.' 'Don't think,' explains Marie, 'that I'm doing marvels because Monsieur Julien is surprised. He is surprised because he was expecting rubbishy work from a rich girl who is a beginner . . . I could kill myself for not having begun four years sooner. . . . One may say it doesn't help to regret what's past—every instant I say to myself: How satisfactory it would have been if I'd been studying for three years. . . . And why draw? Because of . . . all that I've wept over. . . . Because of everything that's been lacking and that still is! Because of getting somewhere by my talent! If I had *all that* should I possibly do nothing?'

But meanwhile she worked as hard as any impoverished art student: from eight till midday, from one till five. At last

she had found something that absorbed both her physical and emotional energy: 'I am very, very happy.'

On Saturdays the artist, Tony Robert Fleury, came to Julien's to criticize the students' work. He was reputed to be the handsomest man in Paris, and in his photograph, with his fly-away moustaches and air of drawing-room bravado, he looks as if he had stepped from between the covers of one of Guy de Maupassant's novels. Marie's first conversation with him at the studio was even more satisfactory than the one with Julien.

'Where have you drawn before?' Robert Fleury asked her.  
'Nowhere.'

'What! Nowhere?'

'Yes, I had thirty-two painting lessons to pass the time....'  
'That's not what one calls working!'

'I know, Monsieur.'

'You have never drawn from the life before coming here?'

'Never, Monsieur.'

'It's impossible!'

'But I assure you I have not.'

'You have never had any instruction?'

'Yes... four years ago I had lessons like they give little girls, they made me copy engravings.'

'That's nothing, that's not what I meant.'

'I give you my word of honour....'

'Well, you've got quite exceptional talent, you are particularly gifted and I advise you to work.'

Was it possible such words had really come from beneath that winged moustache? They had. With such a beginning where might she not end? Hope blew its trumpet. 'Then it's true, and I, no... I won't say anything—I should only bring myself bad luck... but I ask God to protect me—I am so afraid!...' While writing, Marie stopped and thought of all the work it meant, of the time, the patience, the difficulties, '... One doesn't become a great painter as easily as one says it, besides talent, genius, there's still this pitiless mechanical work.... And a voice said to me, "You won't notice either the time or the difficulties, and you will arrive!..."'

'And, mind you, I believe in this voice... I shall have the *Prix de Rome!*'

Julien and Robert Fleury, as critics of her progress, became her gods. Her valuations of happiness had changed. The moment now that made her heart beat the quickest was the moment that Julien, stepping out of his partitioned-off office, or Robert Fleury arriving at the top of the staircase, took to cross the studio and reach her easel. It was their pronouncements that filled her mind with sunshine or foul weather. Julien started an evening class from eight to ten and to this she came too. How friendly, how cosy these evening classes were! The model in the centre beneath the full blaze of light, the darkness of the room around intimately fencing them in within their lit circle of space. 'Monsieur Julien was quite dumbfounded to see me there . . . he worked with us and that amused me a lot. There was some joking on politics . . . as he wouldn't express any opinions I played the *Marseillaise*.

'Let me see, how many were there this evening? I, the Polish woman, Amélie (the Spaniard), and an American, and then the master. . . . It was all so interesting.'

Her diary becomes full of calculations as to how soon, by putting the work of three years into one, she can catch up with the other pupils, make up for time lost in running after the shadow of the Duke of Hamilton and all the other futilities of her youth: futilities to her mind because they had led to nothing: for worldly success was what she intended art should ultimately bring her. 'Briefly, if I had begun three years ago, I could content myself with six hours a day; but now I must do nine, ten, twelve, as many as possible. . . . From twenty-four hours take seven for sleep, two to undress, say one's prayers, wash one's hands at different times. . . .' this is the kind of thing that fills her diary.

## 2

Marie's thoughts at present hovered a good deal round the young politician, Gambetta, now the cynosure of all France, and who next year was to become President. In her most extravagant moods she would imagine herself getting to know him . . . becoming an intimate friend . . . marrying him. But

in her heart she knew this scheme for what it was—a mirage that would always remain a mirage; and descending lower in the scale of her ambition would turn to Gambetta's political opponent, Cassagnac, whom she did at least know. And Paul de Cassagnac was far from being only connected with her ambition: each time she met him she realized that here was the man whose mind was more in tune with hers than that of any man she had known. He was an ardent Bonapartist, his political romanticism well balanced by remarkable intelligence. His looks were not anything in particular, but all the same his face had moments of beauty in spite of its sensitiveness being barred across by one of those terrific moustaches which women of that time found attractive because of the attractive men who wore them. And Cassagnac's force of character, his prestige as politician, writer, man of the world, and duellist more than countered any physical lack. He had too a charm, a self-assured air which brought success half-way to his feet. As for duels, they were his speciality. And here arises an interesting question. Were men of that date, Cassagnac himself, for instance, so constantly insulted that these perpetual duels were a necessity? Or did these combats—which to a later generation bear such an inescapable atmosphere of *opéra comique*—so embellish the man of that day that he deliberately heated an incipient quarrel to the point when a duel was inevitable? Were, in fact, duels the result of insults, or insults of duels? It is a question of emotional values which it is impossible for another generation to gauge. One aspect of the duel is, however, clear: it enhanced a man's masculinity, gave him a *panache*, a marked superiority over the man who had not fought one.

Now, in this winter of 1877 to 1878 Cassagnac came fairly often to the Bashkirtseffs' house. His attitude to Marie was very different to that of an Antonelli, a Pacha, or a Lardarel. He listened to her with his charming air, but at the same time those black eyes, in which smouldered so much intelligence, were taking her measure, summing her up. As for her conversation, she was, he told her, like 'a lunatic who gets up at night and walks along the edge of the roof without realizing the height she is at.' Marie records this criticism with pleasure.

And something she saw in *Le Figaro* about Cassagnac also gave her pleasure; an incident that had happened this January at the celebration of the mass for Napoleon III. When the crowd had seen Cassagnac coming down the steps of the temple, nearly all of them had instinctively uncovered. 'They paid homage,' writes Marie, 'in such a striking and simple manner that I'm almost glad not to have been there. I should have become infatuated.'

On the 18th January Marie wrote and sent off one of the prim little dinner invitations of the day.

'To Monsieur de Cassagnac'

'Mama wishes me to invite you to dinner on Saturday  
at half-past six.'

'At seven o'clock,' writes Marie, 'Popaul [her nickname for Cassagnac] arrived with that self-assured manner of his which you know, and a few moments later Bertha and her sister. Except for Mama and my aunt we were all in white. You can imagine what the dinner was like with eight women and only one man! I was looking very pretty, and dressed in a way to leave none of my physical advantages in the shade.'

After dinner Cassagnac discovered the white box in which Marie kept the exercise books that formed her diary, and was just on the point of reading them when she flew at him, and there followed one of those scrimmages that are so useful in furthering an embryo friendship; and this, in turn, led to an exchange of 'impertinences'. In fact Marie discovered that like every really intelligent person Cassagnac appreciated all the delicious frou-frou of nonsense. Later this evening other friends came in, among them a man referred to by Marie merely as 'the Prince'. 'I was very annoyed,' she writes; 'all the same I behaved well and took the Prince into the little drawing-room.' But while she talked and showed albums to this man who did not interest her she was all the time looking at a large mirror in which was reflected the man who did. Not only Cassagnac but the other people grouped about in the big drawing-room were depicted there in front of her. How this mirror she mentions strikes the note of that period! Not the mirror of to-day, a stark sheet of glass, but the draped and

festooned mirror of the 'seventies, its looped-back curtains so charmingly suggestive of some absorbing and now to be revealed mystery.

Looking too at that big drawing-room reflected on the wall of Marie's room we see the women of that time, their bodies relentlessly laced into the hour-glass silhouette that was the fashion; for the back drapery of the early 'seventies had slid lower, and in consequence women's bodies now appeared as over-stressed curves joined by the narrowest possible waist. To this vase-like race of women only the fewest attitudes of body were possible: no lolling, no sideways leaning, no casual bending; such things, with torso clamped within tenacious corsets, were out of the question. The body could move rigidly to and fro from the hips, and that was all. In sitting, only three attitudes were feasible. The body could be bolt upright, or else lean forward all of a piece to be propped, for instance, against the handle of a parasol. The third attitude achievable was to lean right back in an armchair, so prone that the face was all but upturned to the ceiling: a pose which to be done in any comfort required a footstool. This intensive corseting was a social-sexual-perversion to which every woman submitted (except a few who were looked on as 'odd') a deformity of body greeted with a murmur of approval by the gratified male: for approve of it he did: the smaller the waist, the greater the admiration. In return for these tortured figures the men of the day were always ready to manipulate hassock and cushion so as to give their victims such relief as could be procured by the nearly-prone pose in an armchair. Then, the ladies thus arranged, the men would carefully thread their way between the foot-stools, mutely appraising this exhibition of abnormality. Here then as we look in Marie's mirror we see these women lying backward in their armchair, and bending over them men with huge moustache and careless hair. Above them glares the shadeless gas-globe chandelier, and about the room stand the palms and the aspidistras which are still as fashionable as when the Bashkirtseffs gave their Nice party several years ago. Each palm has its fanciful china pot, and the tables the palms stand on have table-cloths, and the table-cloths are thick with embroidery. For just as now the

root idea of furnishing is to remove all superfluities, to strip and to expose, so then the idea was to have as many layers of matter as possible: everything that could be covered was covered, everything that could be ornamented was ornamented. The doors had tasselled *portières*, the mantelpieces not only tasselled drapery but tasselled curtains to pull to and fro.<sup>1</sup> Mixed with this stuffy solidity was a strangely alien touch from Japan; for across tall black screens would straggle an oriental bird in gold thread, and women would hold in their hand a long-handled Japanese fan to screen their face from the fire. This touch from Japan, and the conservatory that played such a large part in the drawing-room life of the day, were the two things that spoke to the imagination. When the weather was warm enough, a heavily upholstered and buttoned arm-chair or sofa would make its incongruous appearance in the conservatory in the glaucous light that filtered through the leaves of maidenhair and geranium. After the gas chandelier and the effortful politeness of the drawing-room, the conservatory was a place of release, of refuge, the fitting *décor* for friendship, for intrigue, for romance—what whispered intimacies did not those listening geraniums hear!

But while we have been gazing into the mirror with Marie, Cassagnac, in his turn, has been looking at her. Also, as she discovered later, he had been talking of her, of her 'beauty as a statue, and told Dina that *le bon Dieu* could not make another back equal to mine.' Then tea was brought in. 'Cassagnac talked for some time with Madame F . . . , I think because her corsage was so prodigiously open . . . Cassagnac said he had

<sup>1</sup> The above was the general idea of furnishing at that time, but the more original minds had already started schemes of decoration that now, sixty years later, are considered the last word in modernity. When George Moore set up with his friend, Henry Marshall, at 76 Rue de la Tour des Dames they had their drawing-room done entirely in cardinal-red draperies that hung from the middle of the ceiling: another room had the walls covered with figured cretonne: in another was an altar and a Buddhist temple; there was a profusion of canopies and cushioned settees, and in Henry Marshall's room there spread over his bed a tree of gardenias in full bloom. Neither could any modern pet be more grotesque than George Moore's—a boa-constrictor which he kept in his bedroom and fed with live guinea-pigs.

a headache, and at twelve o'clock took himself off.' 'Good night, Maman,' he said as he kissed Marie's hand, for the scrimmage over her diary had opened up for these two the easy world of *blague*.

## 3

One day at the beginning of December the Bashkirtseffs' house was all astir. Old Monsieur Babanine had had a seizure, and was extremely ill. The great Charcot was sent for. Marie, the only woman of the family who kept her head, was allowed in the room while the consultation between Charcot and Walitsky took place: 'They treat me,' she writes with complacency, 'like a third doctor.' The household regrouped itself round the sick man: 'Dina is always by the bed, that goes without saying; mama is ill with worry, Walitsky, the dear Walitsky, runs about, looks after everything, scolds, and consoles.'

A month later, in the January of 1878, the whole family moved into 67 *Avenue de l'Alma*. 'Grandpapa was carried there, it was so sad to see him!... Directly he was in his room Dina and I went in to look after him, and poor grandpapa kissed our hands.' But they had not been in the new house a week before Walitsky himself was taken ill. '*Addio Signorina*,' he said a little sadly to Marie one evening as she left his room. They were the last words she heard him say. At two o'clock that same night he realized what was about to happen. He might be dying, but say good-bye to old Monsieur Babanine he would. Somehow, with the help of Aunt Sophie who alone was with him, he managed to struggle up from his bed and into the passage outside. But to go further was beyond him. He crossed himself three times, and then, desperate at not after all being able to get to his old friend, and determined his good-bye should be heard, in one supreme effort he gathered together the life he felt slipping from him, and shouted '*Adieu*' so loudly that Madame Bashkirtseff and Dina came rushing from their rooms, only to see him fall dead into the arms of Aunt Sophie and the valet, Triphon.

He was gone! This close, this day-in day-out devoted friend: this intimate, familiar figure who was part of the very texture of the family life. It was impossible to believe. 'It was,' says Marie, 'perhaps the first time in my life that I shed tears free from egoism or temper.' Madame Doubeldt and la Baronne Linsongen were allowed in, and we wept together . . . this poor man who never annoyed anyone and did good to everybody.

'But it was grandpapa who wept most! he who suffers so much himself . . . he can neither talk nor write, so that one has to say fifty words before one can guess what he means, and he groans at not being able to make himself understood. . . . What is so touching is that instead of becoming disagreeable he has become angelic, so that I often go to his room to tell him what is happening, and do things for him.'

Meanwhile, the train was bearing Walitsky's body to Nice. 'It seems unbelievable . . . we talk of him as if he were alive, and for us he will never be dead. . . .' 'It is an irreparable loss, one would never believe that in real life such a character could exist.'

One has heard little of this man till now, but one feels that in his going a light that had all these years glowed serenely in the centre of the family had been extinguished: a fire at which they had warmed themselves had gone out: 'The house is so empty,' writes Marie, 'only four people, and grandpapa in his room.'

'It is impossible for me to believe in Walitsky's death. It would be such a deep, such a profound grief; all the same I have seen him . . . dead.'

Her sadness was sincere: 'May he know what I am thinking . . .' she writes, 'what is being thought and said of him. May he hear me in the place where he is, and if ever he had reason to complain of me he will forgive me because of my profound esteem, my true friendship, and from the bottom of my being, my regret.' Yes, the loss of this man was a real grief; but at the moment knocking at her door were new interests, new possibilities; and her spirit rose to meet them. Walitsky was dead—but she, she was alive, she was young. 'All the same what a happy time of one's life it is! One is full of vitality,

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one hopes for thirty-six delightful things, goes to the theatre, into society; one has only to wash one's face in cold water and one looks one's best. One pretends one doesn't appreciate what one has got. It isn't true!"

4

The Boyd family, a mother and daughters, now began to play a prominent part in Marie's life. The daughters belonged to the normal, lively, well-bred, well-dressed type of English girl who reacts perfectly to the social nuance of the moment, a type that each generation faithfully produces by the score. Marie, the individualist, the bizarre, was exactly what the Boyd sisters needed, and they in their turn gave her backing and companionship. They too knew Cassagnac, and Marie, finding he often received letters from anonymous women, thought it would be amusing for her and her new friends to write to him too, concealing their identity. This kind of thing was extremely popular in the Paris of that day. Cassagnac, having casually let out that he had just had an anonymous letter purporting to be from five society women, Marie and the Boyds decided to adopt the rôles of these ephemeral women and to carry on the correspondence themselves. This they did, writing to Cassagnac and suggesting that all of them, masked, should come one evening to his house. Their delight can be imagined when shortly after Cassagnac told them he had had a further letter from the five unknown women. Finally, through the medium of the *poste du Luxembourg*, Marie and the Boyds received this from him:

'My dear five ladies.... You have arranged your mysterious rendezvous for to-morrow, Wednesday—agreed!

I have no need to repeat that you are safe—guarded by my word of honour as a gentleman.

I shall send all my servants out and open the door myself.

Yours respectfully,

Paul.'

The conspirators wrote finally fixing Sunday evening between eight and nine for their visit. However, when the day came

the Boyds were an hour late in calling for Marie, and it was ten o'clock before they arrived at Cassagnac's. He himself opened the door, and the four white masked and white gowned figures filed into the hall—Marie, Dina, and two of the Boyds. 'We went in,' writes Marie, 'and sat ourselves down on the sofa, he took off our cloaks and said very politely that he had despaired of our coming.'

'Then, showing us the tickets for the opera: "Here, ladies, is what I promised you, now you can unmask."

'He remained silent and looked at us a long time. Then, all four, we began to laugh and Bertha unmasked.'

'I was sure of it!' exclaimed Cassagnac. 'From this moment,' says Marie, 'all was lost, I became idiotic.'

Cassagnac showed them his house, his collection of armour, his portraits of Napoleon: but the atmosphere was not right, it had become a shade stiff, Cassagnac, beneath his surface politeness, a shade bored. For him the evening had held the possibility of unusual adventure, and here, once unmasked, were only these giggling girls he could meet any evening in the *Avenue de l'Alma!* Marie, trying to be witty, only brought out stupidities, and knew it. The word, the nuance that might have put things right she could not find. She felt, too, that she had cheapened herself: she caught Cassagnac glancing at her and the others in a way that annoyed her. 'This way of looking at women as if they were little things that amuse him revolts me. This ogre... with his soft calm voice, with his emperors! Upon my honour! he takes himself too seriously! He was too quiet, too grave': so she tried to console herself, but it was no good: reinstate herself to her own satisfaction she could not. Hateful it was to know as they drove away that they were leaving behind them just exactly the opposite impression to what they had intended. . . . It was a poisoned evening: one that would inevitably take its place among unpleasant memories. For days afterwards there was an irritation at the back of Marie's mind to think that this man, whose good opinion she so longed to have, slightly, if ever so politely, despised her. Stung with annoyance, her mind clung with relief to the thought of the studio: what a refuge it was!

The aspect of Julien's when she saw it on her first arrival,

an indiscriminate group of girls in an attic, had quite changed; now this attic was as familiar to her as any room in the *Avenue de l'Alma*, the students had become separate personalities with whose characters and idiosyncracies she had to reckon just as much as with those of her family. There was in particular one girl, the star student, Breslau. How much irritation and despair were those two syllables to stand for in Marie's life! Breslau who always did better than she did, against whom she would pit herself, measure herself, and invariably to her own disadvantage. Then there was the Spanish girl, Amélie Beaury-Laurel. Unfortunate Amélie! Pitilessly the studio sky-light disclosed those all but hairless patches of head, those curious and revolting blue reflections on her cheek, that too long upper lip, that futile chin. But within this ungainly creature, now nearly thirty, there lay as much determination as in Marie, as intense a craving for happiness. To Amélie this attic studio was a pavilion of love, and within it moved Julien, her god. One can imagine, when her pale eyes first fell on Marie casually throwing off her fur cloak, her soft fairness emphasized by Chocolat's inky grotesqueness, how Amélie's heart must have contracted and sunk. . . . And then Julien's loudly proclaimed pleasure over Marie's talent, the long talks between him and this *Champs Elysées* girl with all her pretty mannerisms; the growing intimacy—for it was noticeable that the talks between master and pupil were becoming longer and longer: starting with art they would go on to politics, to this, to that, and, finally to Marie's own personal life. It was not long before Père Julien, as she called him, was *au courant* with everything—with the Duke of Hamilton, with Antonelli, with Lardarel, with Marie's struggles and Marie's family.

In general Marie was liked by the other students. She wanted them to like her, and she was agreeable, gay, full of *blague*. Humbly these girls would eye her as she stood before her easel in her black dress from Doucet with its foaming white frills and crocodile belt. Impoverished as nearly all of them were they could manage nothing like this. But after a time Marie noticed that Amélie was struggling to make her own clothes look a little more like hers, an effort that Marie noted in her

diary with derision. She was not old enough to realize the pathos of this girl humbly trying with her few sous to make herself attractive in the eyes of the man she worshipped.

Marie's fellow students got something more solid from her than wit and chic: she would share with them the food that Chocolat brought daily in a great basket that held tray after tray of delicious things devised by Madame Bashkirtseff and Aunt Sophie. Yes, Julien's had become a different place since Marie's advent. There was, for instance, the evening that she arrived with her mandoline, Dina and Bertha Boyd with her. Work came to a standstill: Marie sat on a high stool twanging away and singing while Julien did a hurried sketch of them all. They wanted to look at what he had done but he would not let them: he turned out the gas so that they should not see: he ran off with his sketch, they after him: the studio was in an uproar: yes, certainly, things had changed since Marie's arrival.

But if at times she could immerse herself in this giggling hilarity, another side of her looked on it merely as so much time lost. At the back of her mind now always hovered the figure of Cassagnac. She saw in him a fellow eagle, his wings spread for the heights. 'I am envious of his adventures, his successes, his absurdities.' His force stirred the feminine within her; and equally, if not more, seductive was his comprehending, whimsical mind. She realized that here was the most sensitive, responsive companionship that she had ever had the good fortune to know. If only once their minds could become fused, if, away from the family drawing-room, she could have the opportunity of talking to him with all the ease and freedom of a married woman; have a chance of exhibiting that sparkle and *espièglerie* of which she was capable! And the most likely place for this apotheosis was in the world of masks: that world of freer spirit where one can exist without the drag of one's outward personality—face, name, family obliterated. That world where every daring, every extravagance is possible. Yes, her thoughts turned to again entering this entrancing world with Cassagnac. The first attempt had failed dismally but a second might succeed. She engineered a further anonymous letter, and in return Cassagnac made an appointment.

This time it was to be a party of five: Marie, Dina, Bertha, Madame York, Madame de Dalliens. Marie decided to disguise herself completely. Putting on one of Aunt Sophie's dresses she stuffed four napkins into the corsage, wore a black wig beneath a lace mantilla, and a tulle mask. Dina, too, hid her blondness beneath a black wig. They arrived. All went well. Madame de Dalliens covered with talk what might otherwise have been a first few moments' embarrassment. Cassagnac's attitude to them was the opposite to that of their last visit: there was no contempt in his manner; charm, a charm mingled with respect, flowed from him. They grouped themselves round the tea-table. Dina (whom Paris had most decidedly brought on) 'posed for seduction which made her say the oddest things to Cassagnac: then he told us he had a book called *Les Femmes que l'on n'a pas*'. Really, it was delicious! The whole atmosphere delightfully easy, the acceptance of sex as the most natural thing in the world to talk about and yet without ever overstepping permissible bounds, for Cassagnac was a man who knew to a hair's breadth what for women of his own world those bounds were. 'If there had been anyone there to describe the evening,' writes Marie, 'it would be a curious and charming recollection . . . Cassagnac knows how to say mere nothings so tenderly, with so much tact and respect that one begins to think these expressions are inspired by oneself alone, when, alas! they are the fruit of long experience . . .' And how handsome he looked as he squatted on the carpet in front of them; for this is how he chose to spend most of the evening. But, no, decided Marie as her eyes studied him through her tulle mask, handsome was not quite the word: no, it was more a kind of subtle pride that lay over his face that so drew one, something inexplicably attractive in his whole bearing. How sweet it was in the secret security of this lit room to be able, behind her sheltering mask, to study him so minutely, to have this brilliant *député*, this much talked of man, so entirely theirs, to be tucked away so intimately with him in his bachelor room.

They told him to make three wishes. He said that more than anything else he wanted to fall in love, not lightly as he had before, but seriously.

At this point Madame York interposed that he was said to be in love with a young Russian girl.

'With a Hungarian!' cried out Marie.

'With a Swede!' cried Dina, following her lead.

Some obscure jealousy stirred in Bertha, for instantly she exclaimed: 'Be quick and guess who I am . . . I am so hot!' Cassagnac scrambled across to her on his knees, and she was 'so embarrassed that the lunatic, the fool, the idiot, took off her mask'. Even though Marie had guessed that Cassagnac had a strong suspicion who they were, this unmasking 'was like a cold douche'. Getting up, she went and sat away from the others: Madame de Daillens suggested their going, then 'the other three imbeciles unmasked. . . . The escapade entirely changed its character.'

Insignificant in itself as was Bertha's unmasking, it was to Marie as upsetting an incident as can be imagined. These two hours they had spent with Cassagnac had been an ever-rising tide of success, and on its waves Marie had floated in a quiet, a delicious happiness. The adventure had been doing just what she had hoped—opening up a new and more subtle means of communication with Cassagnac, and now Bertha's precipitancy had closed this new avenue of approach for ever. Going up to the writing-table Marie took a piece of paper, and scribbled on it, 'That's what it is to choose stupid women as one's companions.' Cassagnac took the sheet and read it. 'Oh well,' he said in a low voice, 'wasn't I right in saying that you were the most charming of the five?'

'Oh! quite right.'

'Right, without a doubt!' he said and kissed her hand.

For long after Marie looked on this clumsiness of Bertha as the starting point of all the unsatisfactoriness that was to follow. If only Bertha had not been so precipitate Marie and the others could have finally slipped away, masked to the end, and once in the dark retreat of their carriage, driving home in a smother of laughter, have planned a further visit, and now . . . really, it was maddening. 'If this hundred times cursed Bertha hadn't unmasked . . . I swear to you this taken off mask is one of the greatest and most lasting annoyances that I've ever had. The more the time passes the more enraged I am.' But it was

not Bertha's stupidity but her own character that was as usual to be her undoing.

A few days after the visit to Cassagnac Aunt Sophie wrote asking him to dinner the next Saturday. Thinking the letter was from Dina, he replied to her saying he could not come as he was dining that night with the Queen of Spain. Marie then despatched him a note. 'It seems that you are in the habit of writing to young ladies! To make up to us for your double refusal, at least look in during the evening to cast a ray of sunshine on these poor young ladies.'

Cassagnac did not come on Saturday, but on Sunday, soon after five o'clock, he appeared. The Bashkirtseff household was, for the moment, in confusion. Triphon, the valet, was drunk, and another man-servant had injured his foot: in consequence Aunt Sophie, Madame Bashkirtseff, or Dina had constantly to be running out of the drawing-room to go and look after the grandfather. This occasionally gave Marie and Cassagnac a few minutes *tête-à-tête*. He told her it would be difficult for him to stay to dinner.

'If it is difficult,' said Marie, 'don't do it....'

'You see, *ma petite amie*, I would like to dine here but it means going back to dress....'

'If that's all it is, you can stay.'

'Then, *ma petite sœur*, when your mother comes in, insist on my staying, otherwise it will seem odd.'

'I'll insist,' said Marie. Everything, in fact, was as friendly and charming and intimate as she could have wished. Finally, magnetism after dinner with Cassagnac holding her hands and looking fixedly in her eyes provided her with some interesting moments. Also, when he had gone, it was satisfactory to remember he had told her she was witty and as 'amusing as anything'.

A little later Marie again asked Cassagnac to come in on a Saturday, that being the Bashkirtseffs' day for 'receiving'. He did not come, and fearing to give the impression of pursuing him she did not ask him the next week. But, though she did

not see him, the newspapers were full of him: he was being criticized for his attitude to his party, also he had just fought another duel and, as usual, wounded his opponent. Marie could hardly find time to read the columns devoted to him. A curious envy mingled with her other feelings. If only her name could ever fill the papers like this! 'Naturally, rather than envy Cassagnac I should like to make myself admired, by this man especially, and it's because of that that I rage more than ever against my unendurable isolation.' For the doors of the Faubourg Saint-Germain were open to Cassagnac but not to her. She had her spurts of gaiety, her occasional masked ball or opera, but she was outside the *beau monde*. Her painting was the means by which ultimately she intended to enter it... but how far off was that day... how long the road. 'Art is great but I haven't the strength!... And time passes, passes, sinister, inexorable!... *Mes mères* are too happy that I am amusing myself at the studio....' Amusing herself! They little realized with what steady, passionate persistence she was working.

A little later on Cassagnac again came to dinner, again on a Sunday. He had hinted to a mutual friend that he would like the Bashkirtseffs to ask him that particular Saturday or Sunday, and in consequence Marie had sent him a note.

It is curious after any incident of importance in one's life to look back on the casual occupations of the hours that led up to it, ordinary occupations that held no presage of what was on its way. So on this Sunday Marie went out for a walk accompanied by Rosalie, bought some violets and an india-rubber ball, and heard Mass at the Madeleine. At the moment, her favourite dog, Pincio, was lost. She had a particular affection for this Pincio which went with her everywhere. As the day went on she had a fear that Cassagnac would not come after all, and as her uncles, Alexander and Etienne, were staying in the house this would put her in a detestable position. However, Cassagnac did come, but strained as Marie had been by this absurd fear that he would not, and depressed at the thought that she would probably never see her dog again, she was far from being in her best mood. Cassagnac was just about to fight yet another duel, and at a moment when his own life was

at stake resented Marie's depression over a lost dog, and when she asked him to go to a somnambulist to find out about it he began to tease her. She could not, he said, really mind so much about it.

'On the contrary,' she retorted, 'I mind so much that I'd rather see you wounded than have lost my dog.'

Whatever sentiment Cassagnac may have had for her evaporated on the instant. If she had let fly a poisoned arrow at him the effect could not have been more conclusive. He became, says Marie, 'absurd'. When she offered him a liqueur he told her to offer it to her dog: when she pressed on him some essence of violets that had come from Nice he begged her to scent her dog with it. Every subject he twisted round to the wretched animal, and seemed so really annoyed that at last Madame Bashkirtseff and Dina intervened on Marie's behalf. Later in the evening Dina, for once tactless, told her cousin she seemed depressed. And she was more than depressed: panic was spreading through her. What had she done? But the whole thing was ridiculous... Cassagnac could not, surely, be going to take it seriously....

'You are annoyed?' she asked him.

'No, but disillusioned.'

And at eleven o'clock he went.

Marie's great wish at this time was that she could paint well enough to do Cassagnac's portrait. She might wish, but at present it was out of the question. The pity of it that she had not started painting sooner! 'Oh, *mon Dieu*, if I had begun two years ago... it makes me mad!' Things altogether were not going too well. Cassagnac, expected again one Sunday to dinner, had at the last moment excused himself. Later, he did come, but not often, and when he did his attitude was not the same. Cassagnac was a very different proposition to the other and younger men whom Marie had before captivated. In Cassagnac her immaturity was confronted with a dominant mind, with all the hidden strengths and resistances of a seasoned and brilliant man of the world. 'There is, as you know,' Marie tells her readers, 'some sort of *gène* between Cassagnac and me which bores me a good deal. The only way of arranging things and calming myself is to leave it quite alone.' But

beneath the surface she was very sad. Slight as had been the suggestion that there was anything warmer in his feelings for her than friendship he had all the same become the beacon of her days. Not only had he given her a companionship more satisfying than any she had known, but stretching from her to him were tendrils of emotion that were bruised by this indifference. Julien, who had by now developed a great interest in her and all her doings, knew a certain amount of the Cassagnac episode, and what he did not know he guessed: and now, noticing her restlessness at the studio he thought to himself, 'Ah, I know why!'

More than ever the studio was to Marie a place of refuge. Her mind nailed to her work, she could escape from other thoughts. But when she had come home, those endings to her day alone in her room when she listened to the carriages driving along the street, bearing other women to the kind of houses, to the type of dinner-party, to which Cassagnac went and she did not, then she became drenched with despair. Her mother and Dina, coming back to the house on one of these April evenings, told her they had seen Cassagnac driving with a young man in the Bois. '*Mon Dieu*,' writes Marie, 'why not? I knew that he went into the world, to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and it had already infuriated me and made me weep because I myself don't go there. It's always the same story . . . my old deprivations.'

'The air is heavy, it is hot; towards evening the streets are full of carriages, I see France, the French, and Paris!

'Paris is necessary to anyone who wants to be known, but I hate it . . . one can't breathe in this town, already it's too hot.'

Two days later Marie was walking back from the Louvre with one of the students at Julien's—for she was now on the most friendly terms with them all—when this girl remarked that she had heard that Cassagnac 'had become engaged to a Polish girl who hadn't a farthing'. Marie felt, she says, as if 'a block of ice' had been put inside her: 'It seems unbelievable. A Polish woman and poor. Then he must love her. For him to marry her without money, she must be pretty, intelligent, sweet, good, in fact the pearl among women. . . . He marries a young girl, poor and unknown, why is it not me?' And then,

in her extravagant manner, she exclaims: 'I would give a year of my youth (five of my old age), I would let a finger be cut off my hand and I would promise to dress myself in black serge for a year to be in the place of this girl.' But, she adds sadly, 'It's not a question of all these fine things. I complain of nothing, I only regret, I regret profoundly, bitterly, with all my heart, that it is someone else.'

Now, so she decided, she must get to know Gambetta. 'He would be a powerful friend.... Yes, *mon Dieu*, if only that could happen! Women have been known to succeed solely through their wits... try and make a friend of him.' The fact that Gambetta was in political opposition to Cassagnac would be an added source of pleasure. She will, she says, make a bid for Gambetta's friendship if only 'to do something disagreeable to Cassagnac... who has not known how to appreciate me.'

Dina told her that if she had been half as agreeable to Cassagnac as she was to other men he would have behaved differently, but Marie had the idea fixed in her mind that Bertha's removal of her mask had, as she put it, 'lost' her Cassagnac. 'She put me in a position so false, so strained, so painful, that I can't think of it without getting into a rage... the fool, the donkey, the idiot!' The fatality of Marie's own remark to Cassagnac about her lost dog never dawned on her.

Three days after hearing the news of his engagement Marie went to confession.

'You are not without some sin,' said the priest, 'are you subject to laziness?'

'Never.'

'To pride?'

'Always.'

'You don't fast?'

'Never.'

'You have offended anyone?'

'I don't think so, but it's possible: there are many little things, my father, nothing serious.'

'May God pardon you, my daughter, etc.' and her spiritual diagnosis, which certainly seems a trifle sketchy, was over.

Meanwhile at home she was carefully making a point of always mentioning Cassagnac in a perfectly natural manner when it

would have been noticeable if she had avoided his name. Madame Bashkirtseff, too, was doing her best. 'Mama,' says Marie, 'has already begun to adopt the manner which means that she is being tactful and notices nothing.' Walking one day down the *rue de la Paix* Marie saw Cassagnac's photograph in the window of a shop: 'very like him,' she wrote, 'and in consequence fascinating and splendid.'

Then one Thursday at the end of April, an hour before dinner, Madame Bashkirtseff received a note from Cassagnac asking if he might come and dine that evening without changing.

He arrived with a friend, Blanc, who was in evening dress, and the fact that Triphon all but insisted on taking off Cassagnac's day coat believing him to be in evening dress beneath, provided a joke on whose wave Cassagnac and his friend were swept into the drawing-room so that 'on the instant all constraint disappeared'. Marie's contradictory statements regarding her feelings for Cassagnac this evening are charming. 'For me he hardly counts as a man, I could put my arms round his neck and rest my head on his shoulder as the most natural thing in the world': but all the same she did not miss the opportunity of saying good-bye to him *à la Russe*, he kissing her hand, and she his forehead, 'Oh, I scarcely touched it, and it was the first time and before Dina... and then all depends on the tone, the intention.... He was in a good mood yesterday, this devil of a man!... As for me, it was impossible for me to be coquettish... and I had to be content with a quite natural manner.' But later came the thought—had he only been so charming because 'some demoiselle Archard' had put him into this good humour? Had he come to the Bashkirtseffs merely out of politeness? '*Bigre!* quite disinterested as I am, I should find that *fichement détestable*. What style! What language! One can see that I have been with Cassagnac...!'

A week or so later this Blanc—this '*capitaine de frigate*' as Marie calls him—who had come to dinner with Paul de Cassagnac, called on the Bashkirtseffs. After a few minutes' talk he remarked that 'Paul had told him nothing, but he is convinced that he is going to get married because every time anything is said to him about it he seems annoyed, and that the origin of the Archard family is not quite what one would

wish.' Marie was so upset by these remarks that when it grew dark and the candles were being lit she took a piece of the white Indian muslin of the dress she was wearing and hung it over her face like a veil. What Blanc, who was now playing picquet with her mother, thought of this curious manœuvre we do not know and Marie did not care. 'It is,' she explains, 'almost impossible for me to keep my face and head uncovered when anything annoying happens that I daren't admit and that upsets me . . . if I was given a push I should fall down like the veil that covers me, soundless and unresisting.' Meanwhile, Blanc, whether with intention or not, was assuring her that she with her painting was upraised above ordinary mortals and their miseries. 'Yes, I know it!' she writes bitterly.

Later in the evening, she began, as a joke, to talk of marrying Gambetta. 'All the evening I talked of my marriage with Gambetta, and towards the end I began to think it was possible. Why not? If he would, I should consent immediately. It would be superb, dazzling, splendid!

*'Mon Empereur,* what a sensation! then I should become *présidente de la République!'*

After this explosion she comes to earth: 'My annoyance reduced to its simplest term is an obscure thing that I have not the least wish to think about. . . .

'Besides I'm bravely going to resign myself to the inevitable, though it is dreadfully hard . . . but there's nothing else to do about it . . . to submit oneself to events . . . as you know it's not very agreeable! But there! that's enough whining. I submit to the inevitable . . . and supposing it wasn't true? If it weren't I should be enchanted! But, alas, sad things always are true.'

About a fortnight later, wishing for some seats for a special debate in the *Chambre*, Marie wrote to Cassagnac to ask him for two tickets. It was a slightly impertinent note: the kind of impertinence which when all is harmony between a man and a woman, charms, but which, when things have already gone a little wrong, annoys.

'For once by chance be useful over something. Send me at least two tickets for to-morrow, Friday. If you send them, I promise, to start with, to dress quietly so as not to annoy you, further, I shall let you off various debts of politeness, further-

more I shall say you are well brought up, and I shall subscribe to the *Pays*.'

No, there was decidedly the wrong nuance about that letter. Cassagnac did not even answer it.

## 6

One Saturday afternoon in May Marie was lying on her bed: she was, she says, thinking that 'owing to the Saturdays of the *Cirque*, it was doubtful if anyone would come': their own Saturdays were, she realized, practically over for this year, other attractions were snatching up their friends in other directions, drawing them away from the quiet, the not very fashionable drawing-room of 67 *Avenue de l'Alma*. On this particular afternoon one friend did call but, owing to Madame Bashkirtseff not being well, was sent away. What a still, somnolent atmosphere lay over the house! Marie lay pondering, as usual, on her career. As her thoughts went to and fro she began to have doubts as to whether she was, after all, really so exceptional, really so superior to other people? She got up to confide these doubts to her diary. 'Listen, if I were so extraordinary as all that, the world would notice it; I absolutely deny unrecognized merit.' Up to her window rose the sounds of gay commotion in the street below: some foreign royalties had arrived, and the pulse of Paris had quickened: vivacity danced in the May air. Marie, leaning over her diary, listened to these street sounds rising to her room. Never had she felt more shut out, more desolate. 'All these foreign princes give a special glitter to Paris, and all this racket, all this glitter penetrate in spite of everything into my room, and shine on to my paintbox, my books, my skeleton, my photographs so insolently, so tormentingly . . . ! I feel plunged in despair. Time passes!!!'

'I can't write two words without coming to a stop and then everything turns into chaos, rage, tears!!!'

Her despair fought with her determination, and her determination fought with her despair. 'As he is marrying,' she suddenly bursts out apropos of nothing, 'as he is marrying, how the devil can you expect him to think of anything else, above all of another woman....

'Leave me in peace. You will see. Real merit easily succeeds. I have only myself and I shall arrive.'

Julien's was the place where at present Marie found life most satisfactory. Here, at any rate, she had value. The two masters, Julien himself and Robert Fleury, took, she says, as much trouble with her as if she were a horse that might win the *Grand Prix*. 'You must expect,' said Julien to her one day in a low voice, 'you must expect to be disliked here for I've never seen anyone get on as you have in five months.' And, as in all places where there is a group of competing human beings, there was plenty of envy in the *rue des Panoramas*, plenty of hidden resentment over filched good positions in which to paint the model. Marie one day ceded hers to an elderly woman, who must have been startled to hear her benefactress remark: 'Madame, I am in the right and I could keep this place... according to the rules of courtesy it is yours. I am, thank God, well brought up, and have nothing in common with (forgive the expression) certain animals who do not know how to behave.' This being a thrust at a particular student who in the same circumstances had not given up her seat to Marie. The elderly woman, no doubt bewildered by all this gibberish, hesitated: 'Take it, Madame,' continued Marie. 'I give it you as much for your sake as to glorify myself. I do this fine action because I respect myself.' ('Half *blague*') adds Marie for the benefit of her readers.

There was, at this time, a man in love with Marie: a man whom she refers to merely as 'M'. It is curious how absolutely denuded of personality anyone becomes when referred to by an initial only; it is like being asked to take an interest in a suit of clothes with no one inside them. Marie gives us several pages of conversation between herself and this man, but her lack of interest in him spreads to the reader. All his protestations were to her only so much knocking against the outer walls of that place where in spirit she sat and brooded over Cassagnac.

On one of these May Sundays Marie painted her first still life in her studio at home: a bunch of violets in a porcelain vase with a red book at the side. Here was something to do to fill the emptiness of these Paris Sundays. 'Each Sunday I

shall do something. . . . In that way I shall be drawing all the time and shall get used to colour.' She decided too that every evening when she got back from the studio she would do sculpture. 'With working one gets through the day pretty well from eight to six—but the evening!'

'In the evening I shall do sculpture . . . so as not to remember that I am young and that time is passing, that I am bored, rebellious, and that it is all dreadful!'

'How I have dreamt of political salons, then of society, then of a rich marriage, then again of politics. . . . And yet nothing!' To paint was the only solution. But if only her mother would not keep on tidying up whenever she was out of her studio! 'I beg and implore her not to . . . whatever I say she does it with an obstinacy that is like an illness. And if you knew how exasperating it is, and how it increases my impatience and my brusqueness which have no need to be increased! I believe she loves me a great deal, I too love her a great deal, but we can't be two minutes together without exasperating each other to the point of tears. Briefly, together we torment each other, separated we should be wretched.'

Not that Marie excused her own irritability: far from it. 'Yesterday,' she writes on one occasion, 'I was very rude to my mother. Then I came back into my sitting-room which was in darkness, and falling on my knees I swore before God never again to answer back . . . when she makes me beside myself: either to keep quiet or to go away.'

'She is so ill, anything might easily happen to her and I should never forgive myself. . . .'

Besides this pasteboard figure of 'M.' there are other men and women friends of the family who pass through Marie's diary. But, like him, they are most of them merely initialled and ticketed figures whom we never get to know intimately: we see them coming and going in the *salon bleu*: hear the women occasionally asking Marie to dine or go to the play: see one of the men driving along in a dog-cart, or another riding by in the Bois, hands affectedly posed, in the fashion of the moment, one on either hip.

About a fortnight after her tactless letter to Cassagnac Marie met him again. She and her mother had driven to a shop in

the *Faubourg Saint-Honoré* to buy disguises in the shape of a wig and spectacles (for no detective ever bought more disguises than did the Bashkirtseffs) when, on their way home, they saw Cassagnac walking along the street. Marie gave him a cold little bow, and he came up to speak to them. Then, giving as an excuse that he had just seen a woman whom he wanted to avoid, he got into their carriage. At once Marie started to attack him. It was her unfortunate letter over again but still worse. She was sarcastic over the number of his women victims, told him he was 'diminished and extinguished', said that she detested useless people and that, as far as some particular tickets were concerned, 'thank God, she could get them elsewhere.' 'All of it in a laughing way,' so she explains. But, laughing or not, it was a mistake. At their door Cassagnac left them.

'And,' writes Marie on another page, 'all the tendernesses pressed back into my inmost being, what do they say . . . ? They say nothing . . . they murmur and hide away still further.' 'I spend my time saying savage things that fill me with delight and astonish other people. . . . It would be all right if there wasn't a bitter edge to it, if it wasn't the fruit of this unbelievable bad luck over everything.'

Though she could now seldom see Cassagnac to talk to she could on occasion, that is to say when she could get the tickets, go to the sessions at Versailles and watch him from afar. This she did with Aunt Sophie two days after meeting him in the street. At Versailles she amused herself by making sketches of the profusion of masculine heads in front of her, pretending to be oblivious of Cassagnac. He, however, saw her, appeared surprised, and borrowed a pair of binoculars to look at her, then, assured he was not mistaken, gave her a calm bow. The next day Marie was there again, and as it so happened that Cassagnac was suspended till October she therefore sent him by the attendant a little box of pink sugar-plums which she had put inside an envelope, writing on it, 'To soften the situation I send you these pink pearls. . . . Your friend as disinterested as eternal.' One feels that to ignore the situation would on the whole have been more tactful.

'I feel the need,' wrote Marie about this time in her diary,

'of explaining to you the actual situation, and giving a glimpse of my future plans . . . so as not to have to return to them again. . . . Before everything, and in spite of everything, there is my painting. Then there is Cassagnac, who is a celebrated man and who ought to have opened the door of politics for me, which he has not done in the very least, and partly because we know no one, are not in our proper position. Besides, the fellow amuses me a great deal, and might (there are moments I think it) have meant something serious to me. But thanks to various circumstances he remained a friend. I should have been content with friendship—and now I have not got even that! This superior being so full of faults, this being who is so like myself, finds nothing in me to attract him, and, further, finds another woman whom he wishes to marry. . . .

'One might say that up to the present nothing has accumulated in my life except things for which I want to be revenged. . . .

'For the moment we are speaking of Cassagnac, which interests me. There it is then! If he marries, it will be a great pity and *Amen*. . . . I have concealed nothing, I shall not have to explain things; this is a summary of everything: keep it in mind and leave me in peace.'

All this time the old grandfather was lying on his bed seriously ill. In and out of his room Marie would go doing anything she could to make his existence less dreary. She would read him the papers, comb his hair, even cut it when she found he disliked the idea of anyone else doing it. 'I adore him now! If you knew how interested he is in the smallest things, how fond he is of us all since he has been in this terrible condition.'

Owing to her throat ('pharyngitis, laryngitis, catarrh, nothing but that!' she exclaims sarcastically) Marie was sent this summer by her doctors for several weeks to Soden for the waters. Doctors were now always peering down her throat, but peer and prescribe as they might they never seemed able to do anything effectual. 'They bore me, all these doctors!'

Hardly were she and the others back from Soden when the grandfather died. 'I stayed till the end, on my knees, sometimes putting my hand on his poor forehead, sometimes

feeling his pulse. I saw him die, poor dear grandpapa . . . after so much suffering . . . during the service that took place close to the bed Mama fell into my arms, they had to carry her out . . . everyone cried out loud. . . . It was a blow that was expected but all the same it is overwhelming.' First Walitsky, and now he! Already the landmarks of her childhood were beginning to disappear. As Paul was nearly always in Russia the family group had now shrunk to four women.

## 7

Autumn came: then winter. Intellectually, Marie at times felt extremely lonely, and there would arise in her a longing to know intelligent people, 'to penetrate into the intellectual world, to see, to listen, to learn.' 'What an awful existence! If I were clever I should know how to get myself out of it. There's nothing so odious in this world as not to be of it, to live hidden away and see no one interesting, not to be able to exchange an idea. . . . That is death, hell!'

Meanwhile there was at least Julien's. Marie's energy, dammed up in other directions, swept back and poured itself onto her canvas. One day this October when the master, Robert Fleury, came and stood by her easel and saw her first painting he gave vent to an outburst of those Oh's and Ah's that only a Frenchman knows how to manipulate effectively. Marie said she was afraid she was not advanced enough to paint but Robert Fleury told her that on the contrary she could go straight on to painting from the life, and stayed a long time at her easel correcting, chattering, smoking. 'I know,' writes Marie, 'that as a pupil he adores me, so does Julien.' And she was right. It was inevitable that her intelligence, her unusual personality, her almost desperate keenness should charm these men. But, naturally, for her to be singled out like this was not to be without its repercussion. The other students, friendly to start with, were becoming the reverse; they began to damp her hopes, to impress on her that studio success meant nothing. 'It is amusing to hear these women say just the opposite to what they said ten months

#### AT JULIEN'S

ago when they were certain of being the first to get medals. It is amusing because it is one of those comedies that are played everywhere in the world, but it gets on my nerves. . . . These studio trifles bore me.' But the menace of Breslau was not a trifle. 'I am afraid of Breslau's future. I feel gloomy, sad. . . . In what she does there is nothing feminine, banal. . . . She will be noticed by the Salon. . . . I am really mad with envy, in art I am a child and she a woman.'

This was one of Marie's black days, for the encouragement from Julien and Robert Fleury had a reverse side: it had made her always expect now to do brilliantly, and when she did not, despair enveloped her. 'It is freezing, it is snowing,' she writes one day in December. 'Never, never have I been so downcast, benumbed. . . . There is nothing in the world that makes me feel interested in anything in the world.'

'I work, but like a machine; I must do a good study and get some compliments. That will reawaken my interest in artistic glory and will give me a reason for existing.' But how long, how long was the path . . . ! Steadfast, searching gaze at model, subtle push of brush into paint on palette, infinitely careful touch of brush on to canvas—and then again, gaze, push brush, touch canvas . . . again . . . again . . . on . . . on. . . . And even when she had become a competent painter, even a famous painter, how long still the journey to that universal fame for which she lived, without which she could have no sense of fulfilment. To write her down merely as an impatient egoist is not entirely to state her case. There is no doubt that there is a certain type of mind to which a complete marriage with life is a prime necessity for happiness; and to this type Marie's mind essentially belonged.

And all the time within her throat certain microbes never ceased their infinitesimal but relentless work of destruction. The activities of this unseen world of germs subconsciously blackened her outlook, increased her hours of depression. But, so far, her childish fluctuating loveliness remained untouched. 'This morning, as Robert Fleury was talking to me in the corner about the cartoons for my sculpture, I listened to him with a baby, *ingénue* manner, my cheeks changing colour . . . while talking to me he couldn't help smiling, and I too, for

I was thinking that I smelt of fresh violets, that my naturally wavy hair, fluffy and light, was deliciously lit up and that my hands, holding I don't know what, had delicious poses.'

One morning, in the January of 1879, when Marie arrived at Julien's, the first words she heard as she came into the studio were: 'Now, Mademoiselle Marie, come and take your medal!'

This was the kind of thing she would have liked to be always happening to her: dramatic, sudden, enchanting! The kind of thing that ought to be constantly happening, and yet so seldom did. But for once it had! At intervals at Julien's there were competitions judged by Julien himself, Robert Fleury, and Boulanger, and it was on these occasions that the medal was given. 'You have the medal, Mademoiselle,' Julien said to her, 'and you have it with success, these gentlemen did not hesitate.' Marie sent out for some punch, that being the custom: it would have been more in keeping with her feelings if she had ordered nectar.

Later in the day, at an evening party, Marie showed her medal to her hostess. 'This, Madame,' she said softly, 'stands for a good deal of courage.'

But as might have been foreseen, Julien had been pushing Marie along beyond her really very limited capabilities. In the weeks that followed she scarcely made any progress. There came a day in February when one of the masters remarked, 'I can't understand why, when you've so much talent, that you find such difficulty in painting.'

'Oh, I don't understand either' she wrote when she got home, 'but I feel paralysed. It's no use fighting any more.' And seizing some logs, she piled up the fire in her room. Not that she was cold: it was merely one of the thousand fires which have been piled up by mankind when annoyed. On a wave of nostalgia Marie's thoughts turned southwards—if only she could hear once more that slow plunge, that long-drawn hiss of the sea at Nice! In that sound would be comfort for all the disillusionments and bitternesses of Paris.

She did not only think of Nice: a week later, she and Paul were there. Familiar place, sweetened by absence! And how reassuring, how cosy, after the impersonality of Paris, to be recognized, to be greeted on all sides! 'It is Mademoiselle Marie!' cried delighted voices; the drivers of the *fâcres* were smiling and touching their hats; one of them was crying out it was he himself who used to drive Madame Romanoff. This was a warmth better worth having than that of the over-piled logs in her studio. She and Paul put up in the house they had first been in at Nice, Villa Acqua-Viva, now turned into an hotel. Marie wanted to find her old schoolroom, and wandered off to look for it. But how altered the house was inside! Hunting about, she came on a corridor she had never seen before . . . no, this surely was not the way . . . and then suddenly, on opening a door, there, in a room that otherwise seemed unfamiliar, was the familiar schoolroom wall-paper, that intimately known, thousand times gazed-at pattern that held within its intricacies all the blessings she used to send, north, south, east and west to the Duke of Hamilton.

## 9

It was a summer's day in June at the studio. Just as Marie was leaving at midday the speaking-tube gave its whistle. The old *bonne* who looked after the place put her ear to it, and then, turning to the students, said, 'Ladies, Monsieur Julien asks me to tell you that the Prince Imperial is dead.' 'I assure you,' writes Marie, 'I gave a genuine scream. I sat down on the coal-box.' Everyone began to talk at once. 'A moment's silence, ladies, if you please,' went on the *bonne*. 'It is official, the telegram has just come. He has been killed by the Zulus. It is Monsieur Julien speaking.'

The fury roused in France against the English over the Prince Imperial's death is a matter of history, and in Marie's diary this indignation reverberates in every page. It is an 'atrocious', the English are 'murderers'; for several days she could write and think of nothing else.



This summer two young Serbians became almost part of the Bashkirtseff household; they were the Princes Alexis and Bojidar Karageorgevitch, now living with their parents in the *avenue de Bois*. Alexis was a little older than Marie, Bojidar a little younger, and to Marie and Dina they became almost like brothers. These charming boys relieved the atmosphere of this now entirely feminine household: good humour and pleasantness flowed from them. When Alexis was amused his face squeezed up like a squeezed indiarubber ball, and slowly he began to writhe; not a word came from him, soundlessly he squeezed and soundlessly he writhed. It was most attractive to watch. These two boys, with Marie, Dina, and Bertha—who, now unhappily married, preferred the Bashkirtseffs' house to her own—formed a regular little group, and often when Marie was not working at the studio there would be spurts of gaiety and jokes, anonymous letters and mad telegrams that necessitated many whispered *tête-à-têtes* in a withdrawn corner of the Bashkirtseffs' *salon bleu* 'under the palm'. A young man, Joseph Saint-Arnaud, was the butt of their group. Bourgeois though he was, he held, as Gambetta's secretary, a faint interest for Marie as being a possible path to Gambetta himself. She and Joseph would constantly spar together. This kind of thing: 'I sell wit to those who haven't got it,' Marie twitted him when they met at some party.

'You have so much that you have some to sell? I hadn't noticed it!'

'That's because you're too dense yourself to see wit in others.' This sally delighted Joseph.

Paul—now an extremely fat Paul—was with them on this occasion but not in his usual gay mood, 'his arms crossed,' writes Marie, 'his air downcast and sad, following us round dragging his feet; he is in love, he is determined to marry.' While the Bashkirtseff party waited for their *fiacre* a landau drove up, and out sprang Joseph.

'Joseph, what are you doing?'

'I've lost my footman, and I've been to find my carriage.'

'My dear . . . a footman! *quel type!*'

No one was better at this kind of banter than Marie, but though she might laugh and giggle, her social life was

to her nothing much more than a cardboard world in which she, a cardboard figure, jigged her part. It was all so much time lost. Why, instead of expending her energy in baiting Gambetta's secretary, was she not Gambetta's wife? This little group was amusing enough in its way but the concern of her mind was her career—which, with her ups and downs at Julien's, was at the moment in a sorry enough condition: the concern of her heart was Cassagnac—whom she had lost. The best she could do for the moment was to throw dust in the eyes of the people round her, to pose as being what she was not. 'I say I always have everything I want, I pose as the happy woman.'

Dina had been much improved by Paris; self-assurance had come to her, her figure was beautiful, and her fair hair, almost pale green at the forehead, and turning to gold at the tips, fell below her knees. And at that date, for a woman to have hair that fell below the knees was a definite asset. This year a great-uncle of Dina and Marie, the Comte de Toulouse-Lautrec, came to stay with them in Paris, and looking at the blonde Dina he decided he would like to marry her; to make her, as he put it, 'a young widow.' As he was only a great-uncle by marriage, the idea, if slightly grotesque was within the bounds of possibility. The family discussed the suggestion. 'I have scruples,' wrote Marie, 'I don't want to hand over this girl to this old man, he must be seventy . . . but he may live another ten years yet.'

Time went on. In the autumn the Bashkirtseffs' 'Saturdays'—these 'insipid Saturdays'—began again. In the winter Marie and the others went to the skating rink in the Bois, occasionally to a ball or opera. Sometimes Marie, dressed in a coat of otter skin with a bunch of violets, would go walking along the Paris streets with Bertha: she longed to be able to go out by herself, 'to walk about quite alone, to come and go, to sit on the benches in the Tuileries garden . . . to go into the churches, the museums'. In the 'seventies, however, this for a girl at her social level was out of the question.

Sometimes now Julien and Robert Fleury would come to dinner, and from these evenings Marie drew definite pleasure. 'This evening, an artists' dinner, Robert Fleury, Julien,

Bojidar, Alexis, Bertha; Mama thinks Tony [Robert Fleury] very handsome. All the same it's true. I thought he was short, he is tall, he is forty, and does not look more than thirty-two. They are very funny with Julien. I did enjoy myself. Julien mesmerized Dina and Bertha—we helped at a séance that was full of interest.'

All this time Marie continued to wrestle with her painting, for more and more did it assume the aspect of wrestling. 'Oh, this painting, if only I could do it! . . .' Here she was, already eighteen, and having, from her own point of view, pursued success for years without even so much as touching it. 'To be conscious of one's brains, of one's power to shake heaven and earth, and to be nothing!' she exclaims with the extravagant illusion of eighteen. But, 'what good does despair do?' she asked herself, and a few days later, 'Do you know that it is a great consolation to write things down! There are things that would annihilate one if one did not intend them to be read and in consequence "split to infinity".' Julien more than anyone, understood and sympathized with the hard-pressed condition of mind and spirit of this outwardly luxurious and care-free student. 'Julien is a great fellow in the way he understands . . . and he says I *must* succeed, just because . . . we understand each other, kind posterity, don't we?' she ends up whimsically.

Her moments of definite happiness were becoming rarer. Certainly there were still days when her mind gathering itself together would mount up, a running wave of joy—but then invariably came the undertow, sucking this wave down, merging it in the trough of restless, troubled sea that was now her habitual subconscious state. Her own unhappiness had made her begin to think of the unhappiness of others, and now one of her constant wishes for the future was that she should acquire wealth so as to have vast sums to give to the wretched and the destitute.

Meanwhile, Constantin had been doing up Gavronzi as a sort of sop to encourage his family to come and visit him. 'Thank you,' remarks Marie to her diary, 'I have been there and that is enough.'

So with one thing and another, with work at the studio, with

days of depression, and moments of gaiety, this year, a year stabbed through with the continuous loss of Cassagnac, came to its end. 'What a sad ending of the year! . . .' wrote Marie on the night of 31st December. 'I think I shall go to bed at eleven so as to be asleep at midnight.'

In the early spring of 1880 there arose the question as to whether Marie would or would not succeed in getting a picture into the Salon. As usual Julien was urging her beyond her pace, telling her that at the Salon after this one she absolutely must make a stir, do something phenomenal. For the Salon of this year she sent in a picture of a woman reading a book with a bunch of violets at her side; and it was accepted. As she had only been working a year and four months this says a good deal for her picture or else very little for the Salon. But though accepted it attracted no attention, it was neither praised nor condemned. All the same, there it was: it was actually inside the Salon, it was hung up on a wall. Madame Bashkirtseff saw in its acceptance the first certain step upwards to those Olympian heights on to the summits of which she was positive her daughter would climb. But Marie, her eyes trained by work at Julien's, knew her picture to be of small value. 'I am humiliated at having exhibited what I have; it is pretty but not worthy of me.'

Lately a fresh figure had been added to the Bashkirtseff household, a certain Mademoiselle Elsnitz, a kind of companion governess whose duty it was to accompany Marie to and from the studio. Elsnitz had a large wooden-looking head on a small body, the slow heavy tread of a man, a slow brain, a slow voice, and as for the amount of time she managed to take in opening a door . . . ! It required the greatest self-control in an onlooker not to rush forward and open it for her. Within Marie there gradually grew an intense repugnance for this girl. The way Elsnitz would come thumping into the middle of the room and then stand rooted as if in surprise at finding herself there at all . . . the way she never grasped what was

being said to her . . . the sight of her dirty nails against a piece of bread she was handing you . . . Marie's revulsion grew and grew: Elsnitz's very presence became a torture. Marie's days became filled with microscopic manœuvres to keep a distance between her own personality and that of her companion: dashing upstairs ahead of her so as to avoid walking abreast: carefully taking hold of the water jug just below where Elsnitz's fingers had touched it: looking out of the carriage window so as to try and forget that terrible presence at her side. Marie had only to lift her finger for Elsnitz to leave; but she did not lift her finger. With such relentless sincerity in her diary does Marie expose her every vanity and egoism that she gives a distorted impression of her own character. She has left it to others to record her kindnesses: her readiness always to do anything for anyone; the hours she would spend at Julien's helping a new student when she wanted to be working herself; her generosity to beggars; her care, if she thought she had inadvertently hurt anyone's feelings, to put things right again. So now, sympathizing with Elsnitz's position, a lonely girl forced to earn her bread, Marie chose the daily misery of this companionship rather than have her sent away. Elsnitz remained, and Marie shuddered and endured.

Of late, Marie had had buzzings in her ears. At the studio they laughed at her, light-heartedly remarking that she was becoming deaf: she managed outwardly to treat it as a joke, but inwardly she was frightened, and a few months later a doctor after examining her told her she would never hear as well as she used to. 'It is horrible,' writes Marie. Then her family took her to the doctor, Fauvel, who warned them that her bronchial tubes were badly affected. Her relations were in consternation, but Marie, seriously upset over her hearing, was indifferent as to the state of her bronchial tubes. 'A great emotion for my aunt,' she scoffs, 'the astonishing thing would be if I hadn't got something. . . . I suspected something a long time ago, I coughed all the winter . . . I should be glad to have something serious and have done with it. My aunt is in consternation; myself, triumphant: Death doesn't frighten me . . . I won't wear flannel and I won't stain myself with iodine.'

She had no fear of death: in this as in other matters she thought for herself, and saw no cause for fear. What lay beyond it was to her a matter of interesting speculation. Existence on this earth had turned out very unsatisfactory, extraordinarily the opposite of what she had thought it was going to be: very well then, better die and try something else.

Not only did Marie find relief in writing down her feelings in her diary but often, turning back the leaves, she would re-live the serener moments of her life, those moments when some growing hope had seemed just about to be realized, just about to burst into flower. Past sensations, past emotions would come gently flowing back. 'I remember,' she writes one day after one of these explorations into the pages of her diary of a year or so ago, 'I remember when Cassagnac used to come in it was like a dazzlement: I don't know how to describe it, neither how he looked nor the impression it had on me . . . when I held out my hand my whole being went out to him. And then I felt . . . stripped of my carnal envelope . . . as if I had wings, and then a dreadful terror at seeing the hours go so quickly. And I did not understand! . . . It's a pity that this kind of writing does not allow of isolating special things, everything is mixed up . . . when I want to relive these events I'm annoyed to find them hemmed in with all the others. But isn't this just how it is in life?'

She uses no duplicated exclamation marks, no florid adjectives to describe her feelings for Cassagnac. She had thoroughly learnt by now, what even as a child she had half guessed, that impassioned phrases are the last thing to describe passion. But the loss of Cassagnac was to be to her for the rest of her life a deep, a constant underflow of sadness.

This autumn Marie had at her feet a man whom she refers to as Soutzo. He appears to have been a Greek, and though not actually a prince to have been nearly one, as Marie would reproach him for not being one entirely. Not only was this young man with his pince-nez and his too susceptible heart not quite a prince but he had not enough money: also Marie did not the least care for him. He drew what consolation he could from saying he should consider himself engaged to her even if she would not be engaged to him; said good-bye,

putting on his pince-nez to hide his tears, and went off to fight in the Greek army. Marie comments on how little effect his going had on her, on how tranquilly the night of his departure she slept, and how tranquilly she woke.

It was during this autumn that her deafness became worse. 'It's raining,' she writes one day in October, 'the weather is cold, piercingly, excruciatingly cold; it is dark. I too am like the weather, and I cough without stopping. . . . At half-past three it is no longer light enough to paint, and if I read in the evening I make my eyes tired for painting the next day. The few people I could see I fly from for fear of not hearing what they say. Some days I hear very well and others not, and then it is unnameable torture . . . every ring of the bell makes me tremble. . . . This new and horrible misfortune makes me afraid of everything that I used to wish for . . . With other people I am always as gay as anything . . . I laugh as much as Mademoiselle Samary of the Théâtre-Français, but it is more of a habit I've got into than a mask, I shall always laugh. Everything is over, not only do I believe it is all over but I want it to be. There are no words to describe my dejection.'

But another day she is summoning her courage and trying her best to stand up to what she has to face. 'To resign oneself. . . . To conquer one's sensations and say, with Epicurus, that it is within one's own power to accept evil as good, or, rather, to remain indifferent to what happens. One must have suffered terribly to accept escape from life by this kind of death, and it is not till after unheard of suffering and complete despair that one begins to understand the possibility of this death in life. . . . This,' she adjures herself, 'is not an empty dream, it is something which is possible.'

## II

On New Year's Day of 1881 Marie and Amélie sat working in the early morning at the studio. So far no one else had arrived. There is no place more tranquil, no occupation more penetratingly peaceful than the first hour or two of early

morning work in an all but empty studio. Amélie began to talk of her feeling for Julien. Perhaps a little enviously Marie listened to this patient saga of unrequited love; unrequited, but all the same, unlike Marie, Amélie did see her idol daily. There was on her horizon always the faint star of hope. She told Marie how she could always recognize his step, how, without looking, she knew who it was turned the handle of the door, and how, after six years, these things moved her just as overpoweringly as they had in the beginning.

It was during this January that Julien sprang on these two girls a fantastic project regarding their pictures for the Salon. His suggestion was that they should each do a painting of the studio with all the other students at work. These pictures would, he thought, make a sensation when exhibited. Apart from that consideration, no project could have been more calculated to upset everyone. In the first place it put Marie and Amélie in most embarrassing competition; at once the question arose as to where each was to stand to paint from: to try to take the best place was unthinkable; to take the worst, involving as it did possible failure to make a good composition, lacerating. It ended in a partition in the studio being taken down (but not before a squabble with Julien, and tears from Amélie) and finally Marie and Amélie were placed one each side of the room painting not only the group of students between them, but each the other working at her easel. The discomfort of all the remaining students can be imagined: herded together so that they had barely room to work, conscious that they were all the time posing as models, asked one moment to turn this way by the artist one side of the room and then the next moment requested to turn the other way by the artist the opposite side of the room. If they had been men they would have refused to have been victimized, but . . . they were women and Julien was charming . . . these pictures when shown in the Salon would be an excellent advertisement for him and . . . well, there they all were penned up together like a flock of sheep for weeks on end.

In January Uncle Etienne arrived from Nice, and with him there came 'like a scent from far off' all the Nice news; news of their villa, of 'the animals, the people, the old tradesmen,

the *fiacre* drivers, the shopmen' and the inquiries from these people as to the Bashkirtseff family: 'I am surprised' writes Marie, 'how I can live buried after having been at Nice, in Italy, on the promenade, in the sun! And at present the tomb, the old maids at the studio, and my library!'

'Art? And what would have become of me if I had not worked? Oh! misery.'

Yes, it was fortunate for her she had her work, for the slight going-out that she did—an occasional theatre or dinner or ball—acted merely as an ornamental fringe to her life at Julien's and to that other impalpable life lived within the pages of her diary, that diary sowed chiefly with the seeds of despair. And yet from these seeds something rose up that brought her a kind of comfort. For it is a truth that sorrow translated into any form of art loses at least some part of its potency: 'Woe weeps out her division when she sings.'

At present 'the little group' was not so active as before. Bertha was away, so was Paul. The Serbian brothers, Alexis and Bojidar, had become such familiars that to a certain extent they had lost their first value: they had become too much part of the house to be looked on as an addition. 'It is so comfortable in my room . . .' writes Marie one evening in May, 'the divan with the books the right side of it, and the left shadowed by a palm under which is the big arm-chair, so soft and comfortable. . . . Mysterious lighting, but . . . no one!' and then, her eye apparently falling on Alexis, she adds, 'Alexis is a little nothing at all.'

Alexis was, it seems, none too happy himself, and when he dined with the Bashkirtseffs was inclined to drink too much. 'To forget my griefs,' he would explain when Marie scolded him.

One February morning when Marie was in the studio working away at her picture the *bonne* came into the room at a run, her face congested with importance, and made an announcement. Monsieur Julien had received the cross of the *Légion d'honneur!* Instantly there was a blaze of excitement: brushes and palettes were flung down: Marie and two other students rushed out to a flower shop and ordered a great basket of flowers with an enormous red bow, '150 francs, it's not too much.' Then

they wrote on a card: 'To M. Julien, from the ladies' studio of the *Passage des Panoramas*,' and thrust it among the flowers. At three o'clock Julien came into the studio with his red ribbon. He was afloat in happiness: 'I had the pleasure,' writes Marie, 'for the first time in my life of seeing a man absolutely happy.' Then they all went to the room below: it had been decorated—and there stood the basket of flowers waiting to be presented. For the students to show such pleasure at his success, combined with the success itself, was almost too much for Julien. 'Joy, congratulations, and, too, a shade of emotion'. 'At this moment,' exclaimed Julien, 'I want nothing else in the world'. With touching gentleness he spoke of his family: of his old mother to whom he would hardly dare to tell the news for fear of the shock, of an old uncle who would, he said, weep like a child. 'Just think,' exclaimed Julien to the girls gathered round him, 'Just think, it is only a village! You can imagine the effect! . . . A poor little peasant who when he left possessed nothing . . . Chevalier of the Legion of Honour!' The students did imagine it . . . imagined it so poignantly that they felt the basket of flowers and its red bow were not enough . . . they must do more . . . give more . . . a bronze perhaps? From mouth to mouth suggestions flew. . . . Among this group would most certainly have been Amélie, and within Amélie at this moment was a hidden, exquisite knowledge, the knowledge that it was she and no other who had applied the final pressure that had brought this honour to Julien! She had painted a portrait of a relation, Léon Say, she had refused any payment but instead had implored him to use his influence in procuring the Cross for Julien. A friend of Léon Say related how, on the day Julien received his honour, she had seen Amélie come into Léon Say's room, fall on her knees and, with tears running down her face, kiss his hands.

Meanwhile the friendship between Marie and Julien was progressing. She found a relief in confiding to him her unhappiness and discontent, while he on his part, was no doubt interested at being let in so intimately by a side door into the life of one of the leisured rich in the *Avenue de l'Alma*. Also he had a real friendship for her; 'it is a need of his nature to be charming,' explains Marie. She tells us of a long conversation

she had with him one day in a *fiacre* coming back from some feminist meeting to which she had taken him—Marie, with her peculiar love of disguise, in a black wig. She was amused to think what the driver of the *fiacre* must have thought of this two hours' conversation at the corner of *la rue Vivienne*! Actually their talk was entirely on Cassagnac. As Marie talked on, telling Julien now this, now that, she began gradually to realize how differently it was being registered in Julien's mind to how it was in hers, how what to her had been, and still was, of overpowering moment, seemed to him, in spite of his charming sympathy, a peculiarly artless if rather touching little affair of a schoolgirl: 'terribly childish and sentimental and innocent': that was the impression she realized she made, that she took home with her to ponder over. She did not, so Julien had told her, understand life. Julien did not, so Marie considered, understand love—and what each said of the other was probably true. 'Julien thinks like so many books and plays that have revolted me; *love* for the greater part of the time is not a *consequence* enveloped in a mass of delicate things but an *aim*. . . . He is a little surprised at my . . . saintly ideas, so am I, but that is how I am. Sentimental, or perhaps quite ordinary.'

But as far as tranquillity of mind was concerned, all this digging up of the Cassagnac episode was a mistake, it made her too restless to work, 'upset, troubled.' No—he was married, best leave him alone: 'he doesn't think of me, never has thought of me, and would be very astonished if he knew all I write about him in my solitude.' 'I should very much like to know,' she writes, her thoughts still hovering round this forever silent image set up in her mind, 'I should very much like to know if it's a creditable feeling or simply the overflow of my youth which needs an object for adoration? Isn't it humiliating always to be coming back to this man . . . who has never thought of me as of someone charming . . . whom I knew when my mind was only half formed, making tactless, idiotic remarks? . . . you know what he is to me. And I to him am nothing.'

'How humiliating and silly it is! But, really, it is foolish, idiotic, cretinous, provincial, concierge, bourgeois, old maid,

to cling to the memory of someone who is indifferent to one. . . . It's true that I'm ill, but after all it's not because of that. It's simply a ridiculous side of my nature, or that at twenty I'm becoming an old maid. . . . And then, lack of diversions, I am in the middle of Paris but I don't go out enough.'

Meanwhile her family were looking out for a new house. Marie pretended to her aunt that she had heard of one to let in the *Boulevard Malesherbes*—the street where Cassagnac lived. They set off together, and Marie, while making a show of looking for this phantom house, 'gave a glance at number 161 where C[assagnac] is. . . . It looks old. . . green, outside blinds. . . provincial and not large.' This was the house where but for the perversity of Destiny she would at this moment be living with Cassagnac as his wife. But she was not.

## 12

This February Paris celebrated the seventy-ninth birthday of Victor Hugo. After her day's work at Julien's Marie went at half-past five with her Aunt and Dina to see what they could. Outside Victor Hugo's house, which was itself covered with wreaths and flowers, was an enormous crowd, and there was Victor Hugo himself at the window throwing kisses to the delegations and the people who had come to do him honour. These delegates carried flags which they continually lowered before him. 'One could not see anything more beautiful and more touching,' writes Marie, 'and I should have wept if I had not already done so yesterday and from another cause.' At last the poet backed into his house and the window was shut. '*Vive Victor Hugo!* *Vive Victor Hugo,*' still cried the crowd as they moved away.

The time for sending in pictures for the Salon was drawing near, and Julien now realized that Marie's painting of the studio was not going to be at all the success that he had intended: she had, he told her, 'made a great effort, that it's interesting, not bad, but enough to make one tear one's hair when one thinks what it might have been.'

'Oh! Lord!', exclaims Marie to her diary, 'it could have been foreseen. Julien ought to have known!' In her discouragement she suggested arranging for some accident to happen to her canvas so as to save the situation; but this, Julien considered, was going too far.

By the end of March her picture had been sent in: so had one by Breslau who had now left Julien's. Soon Marie heard that Breslau's had been accepted, but the fate of her own was not known. She scribbled a telegram to Robert Fleury telling him of her anxiety; Rosalie, having no money to send it off, asked the other students to lend her some—and the secret telegram became known to the whole studio. After this Marie felt that she could not go back and face them all till she knew the result of the Salon. But at home was her family, equally on the alert. 'Oh, my family!' she groans. 'No,' she goes on, 'you can't imagine what it would mean to me if my picture were refused.' But two days later Julien came in after midnight to tell her he had just heard it was accepted.

Four days later she had an immense surprise. While she was working at Julien's her family sent for her, and returning she found Constantin in the dining-room, with 'Mama bestowing on him every possible attention', while Dina and the young man, Joseph, who happened to be there, looked on 'enchanted with this spectacle of conjugal happiness'.

Constantin, in fact, had changed his views. Madame Bashkirtseff had lately been to Gavronzi on account of Paul who had just got married, and Constantin had been so charmed with her that he had now come to Paris hoping to persuade the whole family to return with him to Russia.

Constantin was now very different to when we met him before: he ran no needles into anyone, he was everything that was agreeable. Whence this change? Certainly he was ill with consumption, more seriously ill than his family realized, and more than anything else illness changes character and habits. In one point, however, he did fail: he could not understand his daughter taking her painting seriously, nor did he understand how by its means she could ever become famous. In accordance with this view he tried the next morning to stop her going to Julien's, but by nine o'clock she was off

and did not see her 'august family' till dinner. With Constantin's arrival a change came over the Bashkirtseffs' evenings: now they all sat and talked; 'discussed,' endlessly discussed. Marie on the whole admired her father's intelligence as he sat there, rather effective in his large blond way, talking to her mother and aunt: 'my father talks sense and *mes mères* reply childishly.'

On the 1st of May Marie, her parents, and Alexis went to the Salon to see her picture. Walking about leaning on Alexis' arm she felt a glow of pleasure when she saw how well her picture was hung, and later noticed that 'people look at my picture, I mention it with surprise'. With her usual curious habit of bargaining with her Creator she had, while her acceptance at the Salon hung in the balance, given a thousand francs to the poor: 'No one knows it,' she exclaims. 'I went to the *grand bureau* and rushed away very quickly without listening to the thank-you's: the Director must have thought I'd stolen it.... Heaven has repaid me for my money.' Altogether a thoroughly satisfactory transaction.

As the days went on, Constantin's conversation, at first found so agreeable became, from Marie's point of view, the reverse. 'At home always talk about changes to be undertaken. I am bored at all of them! Sometimes my father has absurd ideas; he doesn't believe in them, but he clings to them, like saying, that all depends on my consenting to pass the summer in Russia. People will see, he says, that you are not alienated from your family. Have I ever been?'

The discussion, in fact, of this projected Russian visit was gradually murking the fresher air that Constantin's coming had brought into the family. His wish was that they should all be 'gay', and in response to this slightly pathetic request 'I could not', writes Marie, 'say anything because for the thousandth time I wanted to formulate my complaints against all of them, against my father, but if I had I should have wept.'

We have not all Marie's diary, and in consequence certain sentences such as this one leave us in the air. Though egoistical she was generally fair, therefore when she exclaims, 'my family pretend to be so devoted to me, and they do nothing

for me' she was probably, in the sense in which she meant it, right. But in what sense she did mean it is left to conjecture. On this unfortunate Wednesday in May she said a good deal that had better have been left unsaid. 'At last,' she says, speaking of her father's suggestion of her going to Russia, 'I told him . . . just to annoy him, that I would not go, that I want to have nothing in common with him, that he is no use to me. You will not, or perhaps you cannot do anything?' so she apostrophized him, 'it doesn't matter. You have come, what have you done? Nothing. Very well, don't let's talk of it any more, let that be the end of it, don't bother me.' 'Oh,' she exclaims before closing her diary, 'this has been one of the most discouraging days of my life.'

Added to the irritation over this projected Russian visit she had a secret misgiving over her painting—a misgiving that at times hurt her like a flail. Her picture at the Salon was receiving only moderate attention: Breslau's, on the other hand would, it was thought, receive a medal. The situation seemed to Marie appalling. Not that she took a small-minded view of Breslau's painting, on the contrary she admitted it was admirable, but Breslau's measure of success was the measure of her own lack of it. . . . If she, Marie, was only going to become a mediocre artist, then all her efforts at Julien's were wasted, then this, her last throw in the unequal game with circumstances was going to be of no use.

If Marie did not go to Russia she and Aunt Sophie would remain together, and this arrangement brought its own annoyances. 'Here, in the house, the situation is pathetic. On one side, mama wretched at going, and I bored at being left with my aunt. . . . And, on the other, my aunt who only has us, myself, in the world, and who says nothing but is wounded to the heart by seeing that I should not be happy left with her.'

Finally Marie decided she would go to Russia. ('It would be dreadful to be there [at the Salon] at the distribution of awards. That is a great grief which no one knows about, except Julien.') 'I am at the end of my tether, I spend the whole day without opening my mouth so as not to cry, my throat strangled, buzzings in my ears, and an odd sensation as if my bones were going to poke through my flesh. . . . And this poor

aunt who wants me to be contented, to talk, and to stay with her. I tell you I am at the end of my tether. . . . To stay or to go means nothing to me, but it strikes me that if I was there they wouldn't stay so long. . . . It is Breslau's mention or medal that makes me go. Oh! I have no luck in anything! Then I shall have to die wretched. I who believed and prayed so much. . . .

Finally, the family's departure was 'fixed for Saturday'.

But now further complications arose. Marie went off—in her favourite fashion, incognito—to consult a doctor, who told her she ought to have a course of treatment at Allevard. She told this to Julien, who at once pounced on the foolishness of her going to Russia: 'Your doctors send you south and you go north. . . . Your family will regret it later.' 'In two words,' writes Marie, 'my hesitations begin again! Oh, *là, là*. Potain [the great chest doctor] is coming and I count on his preventing my going to Russia without too much annoying my father. Good, I can't go.'

And then Bojidar came in and gave the final blow. 'The jury,' he told her, 'have been round to the Salon to-day and looked a great deal at Breslau's picture.' Marie's parents thought the tears they saw running down her face were from Potain's saying she had pleurisy in her right lung, but no, 'it is Breslau's picture! That, that is dreadful.'

For Marie to see her father and mother 'walking about on tip-toe' in consideration for what they believed was her wretchedness over her ill-health was, in her present mood, the final irritation. 'Oh! misery! their glances wound, their concessions exasperate . . . and no support anywhere! What can I hold on to? Oh! my painting is a good joke! You know, in moments of wretchedness one is never too unhappy when there is some point of light on the horizon. I used to fall back saying to myself, Wait a little, painting will save us. Now I don't trust in anything. I don't believe either Tony or Julien.

'As if by crying I can hope to paint!!!!' she jeers, and shuts her diary.

While the Russian visit discussions were going on Julien came to dinner one evening and afterwards Tony looked in.

It was a cheerful, cosy little party. Madame Bashkirtseff made Tony the present of an astrachan dressing-gown, and Marie, remembering he and Julien had never seen her arms, draped this peculiar garment on Tony so as to show them off. Tony was 'enchanted' both with the dressing-gown and with the arms that arranged it, and said so. While this was going on Julien sat and observed: he observed the posing arms and he observed the pleasure they gave. 'Julien, sitting there on the divan, under the rose-coloured lighting of the room, seemed amused.' Perhaps it was at this moment as he sat there watching and smiling that the idea came to him (which later he was to divulge) that his colleague and his pupil should marry each other. Yes, portly Julien weighing down the divan with the Bashkirtseffs' good dinner comfortably digesting inside him was quite amused.

On the 23rd of March the final trunk was strapped, and the entire family set off for the station; Marie and Aunt Sophie going merely to act as spectators at the departure of the others. But once at the station, a calamitous, a truly Bashkirtseffian scene arose. Marie, seeing the chief part of her family leaving her, began to change her mind about going herself. 'You see how it is, people abuse and detest each other, but when it is a question of separating, they forget all about it.' She began to weep, her mother began to weep, then Dina, then Aunt Sophie. The wretched Constantin, surrounded by these sobbing women, asked, as well he might, what was to be done? 'I replied,' writes Marie, 'with tears, the bell sounded, we ran to the carriage for which I hadn't got a ticket, and they got into an ordinary compartment . . . I wanted to climb in too, but the doors were shut, and they went off without even saying good-bye to me.' That indignant 'they went off without even saying good-bye to me', is superb.

Even Marie felt her father was to be pitied. 'He must be furious,' she writes, 'for on the whole he has been very charming.'

'I am desperate,' she exclaims the next day, 'at not having gone. . . .' 'Also I am an idiot.'

No, to be left behind, even with the devoted Aunt Sophie,

was too much, altogether too depressing. Within a few hours a post office clerk in Berlin was transcribing a telegram from Paris to the effect that a certain Marie demanded that her family should wait in Berlin till she arrived. The next day there was a joyous reunion on a Berlin station platform, and the whole family went off in triumph to dine together.

When they arrived at Gavronzi it was terribly cold, 'the fields still inundated by the river, puddles of water everywhere, mud, fresh young foliage, the lilac in flower,' and over everything an air of 'mortal sadness'. When they got to the house, 'I opened the piano,' writes Marie, 'and improvised something funereal. Coco gave vent to plaintive howls. I felt so sad I could have cried, and formed a project of leaving the next day.' The unfortunate Constantin was quite embarrassed over the cold as he had sworn to his family that in Russia it was already quite warm.

For Marie to come back to Gavronzi after five years to the same people was like seeing the actors stand in a row on the stage when the play is over—the plot has run out, the interest evaporated, and the row of men and women standing there in front of us, the muscles of their faces no longer tutored for our pleasure, show by their flat indifference that they too share our disillusionment. Here at Gavronzi were the same actors as in that memorable summer when Marie had pitted her budding youth against the unknown forces at Gavronzi—her aunt, Princess Eristoff, little Prince Michael, Pacha, and Paul: there they all were, but their roles were over, and Marie in her diary merely bestows on them a passing glance. Pacha, that once touchingly humble lover has, she remarks, grown fat—and in a sentence he is dismissed: Paul too, that Apollo boy, has become 'terribly big'. As for Prince Michael, Marie guessed a flirtation with Dina—who one day when staying there without Marie had, with powdered nose and peasant's dress, had an ephemeral success. This hinted flirtation momentarily aroused Marie's annoyance, and then Michael too drops from her mind.

Certainly, on her first visit she had been bored, but bored chiefly because she felt she was being held back from the pursuit of fame. Now, the chief reason for her being here was

so as not to be publicly humiliated over her painting, and whereas before she had had more vitality than she had outlet for, now physical ills had laid their hand on her. ‘What is the most horrible of all is my hearing . . . with my character it’s the most cruel thing that could happen to me. . . . The result is that I fear everything that I used to hope for. . . . And, according to what all the doctors I have seen have told me, with my illness it hardly happens to one in a thousand—“Don’t let it worry you, you won’t go deaf because of your larynx.”’ And that is exactly what has happened. You can’t imagine the dissimulation, the continual tension to try and hide this odious infirmity; I can manage it with those who [did not] know me before and who don’t see me often; but, at the studio, for instance, they know!

‘And how it destroys one’s intelligence! How can one be gay or witty?’

‘Oh! everything is over.’

If Constantin had amused himself during his life by running needles into people, he found now that his daughter had learnt from him an equal adroitness. So much in fact did she make him wince that at last he raised his voice in complaint: ‘Unity is strength,’ he protested, following her into her room one day after she had given vent to derogatory comments on Poltava society, ‘Unity is strength, don’t be so discouraging; these little pin-pricks make one feel disheartened at doing anything.’

But suddenly spring burst through, the heat that Constantin had promised was upon them, and Marie was able to paint out of doors. A large canvas was put up on an easel for her close to a kind of movable pavilion that contained two rooms. The rest of the family used one of these, and when it rained some of the sixty servants would rush forward and move Marie’s easel and canvas into the other room. Then, when the shower was over and the raindrops were sliding off the lilac, out would come the servants and back would go Marie and the easel.

Among the old figures at Gavronzi there was a new one, Paul’s wife, Nini, a gentle gazelle-like creature. Marie painted her portrait, and spent a whole day making her a dress out

of a piece of satin supplied by Constantin. There were, in fact, good days when all was harmony; there were also bad days. There was the day when Marie having finished her picture hoped her father would buy it, and he did not: showed not the slightest inclination to do so. There was the day when a mirror was broken, and this and an unlit candle laid by the footman by mistake on Marie's plate at dinner raised a question in her mind—were these things a presage of her own death, or, possibly, that of her father or mother? 'If it is the death of some near relation . . . of my father, it would be a great loss but not like that of Mama, but if of Mama I should never console myself for having said a single cross word to her.' And then comes, of all her bargainings with the higher powers, the strangest of any. 'Perhaps,' so she addresses the Almighty, 'you are asking if I would prefer this death to deafness?' Really, one begins to question if this time the poor girl is not really *détragiée*.

Then there was the day when one of Constantin's mistresses, a French woman, appeared at Gavronzi. He had given her a small property close by, but she could not be prevented from wandering about the grounds of Gavronzi itself, and on these occasions Paul, if he sighted her first, would give a warning signal to his father. On this particular day, however, Paul, in front of Marie, told Constantin of this woman's arrival. Constantin fled, Marie pulled her veil over her face, put up her sunshade to conceal herself still more, and she too rushed away. 'If nothing had been said,' she writes, 'I could have passed it over in silence, but to have it spoken of in front of me is intolerable.' Not only was there the hovering presence of this Frenchwoman but also that of an illegitimate offspring of Constantin, the daughter of a peasant. She, too, was lodged somewhere at Gavronzi. 'All very charming! . . .,' hisses Marie in her diary, 'even the thought that this girl is close by, and might see me by chance when I go out, wounds me.'

Then there was the day when the family could not decide whether they would or would not go on a kind of pilgrimage to pray for the recovery of Marie's health, and then on to Krementchoug. Near Gavronzi was a mountain, and if they went on this expedition they would have to go by a road

Meanwhile, the air was full of Breslau's success. 'She has already sold three or four things; so there she is launched. And I? I am a consumptive.' Should she give up ambition and concentrate on her health? But then, of what use health without success? Of what value success without health? And again, was either of them worth having now that her hearing was so bad? She was like someone whose house was on fire, not knowing what to save, what to sacrifice. Perhaps better die and end the whole thing? But death, considered seriously, seemed to her at her age fantastic. 'No, it does not seem possible,' and her thoughts turned back to the past—'Nice, fifteen years old, the three Graces, Rome, the frivolities of Naples, painting, ambition, unheard of hopes, and to end in a coffin, without having had anything, not even love.' . . . A nostalgia for life invaded her. 'Oh, whatever suffering one goes through there is some happiness hidden within it. I was quite right, there is nothing excruciating but the sorrows of self-love, those have nothing hidden inside them and are worse than death. But all the others? . . . death, despair of love, absences! It is life all the same. Here I am on the point of weeping, I believe too that I am going to die, I am nearly certain I am weaker. Oh! I don't complain of that, but of my deafness! And then, for the moment, Breslau; . . . that is another discouragement. On all sides repulsed . . . beaten.' The humiliation of her deafness accompanied her through every day. If a shopkeeper noticed it she felt ashamed: if she suspected her family were talking louder she reddened. With her friends, with the models, with the students at Julien's it was the same. 'No, no, no, it is too cruel, too horrible . . . my tongue refuses to say "Speak a little louder, I don't hear very well". O God, take pity on me! . . . If I did not believe in God I should die from despair. . . . O God must there be this dreadful separation between me and the rest of the world? And it is I, I, I! Oh! there are people to whom it would not be such a grief, but. . . .' 'The life of a salon, politics, the charms of wit, all that through a fog, and if I take the risk, I also risk covering myself with ridicule or appearing a fool. . . . How it is possible to allow one is deaf when one is young, *élégante*, and aspires to everything. . . .



*Photo Gilletta, Nice.*

MARIE BASHKIRTSEFF  
(SELF PORTRAIT—DETAIL)

In the Musée des Beaux Arts, Nice



'Well, here I am horribly stricken, and stricken with the most refined cruelty.'

Colignon, her childhood governess at Nice, was in Paris, and ill, and Marie went to see her. 'The poor Colignon; I took her some soft white silk for a dress and fichu that I liked so much I had hesitated over it for five months, and decided on this immense sacrifice by the evil thought that heaven would repay me. These calculations take away all merit.'

## 14

This autumn Bojidar could talk of no one but Sarah Bernhardt. He had been staying with her at Havre, 'treated almost as a son'. In such a state of exaltation was he that he announced that having been taken to see her act when he was eight years old he had fainted from emotion. ('It was not a year ago,' comments Marie, 'he was saying horrible things about her.') Bojidar maintained that Sarah detested advertisement and was not the least a *poseuse* ('a little more and he will make out she is a virgin'). Alexis too had succumbed to Sarah. 'I don't blame them,' writes Marie, 'I am envious and it annoys me to hear Sarah Bernhardt extolled, but at the same time I am pleased for I know how much her *mise en scène* enters into her success.' For as she listened to these boys' enthusiasm an idea had come to her. She, too, would have a *mise en scène* as had Sarah! 'I shall build a house, more beautiful than Sarah's, and with a bigger studio.' In a moment she had remodelled her future; she had already begun to think of taking up sculpture, and that now entered into her scheme: 'once this is arranged and progress made in painting and sculpture, well, I could have a settled position, marry some nice man of good family who would not bother me....' This idea of building a house stayed in her mind for days: yes, she must have no one less than Chabrot, the architect of the Théâtre Français, to design it. And when a week later Joseph Saint-Arnaud came to dine she got him to promise he would write to Chabrot about it. But the doctors were sending her away again, this time to Biarritz, and the projected house vanished into space.

The party to Biarritz consisted of Marie, her mother, and Aunt Sophie. With the passing of the years Madame Bashkirtseff had become still untidier; to look at her was to know the meaning of the word slovenly. She was well off, she could always have had new clothes when she wished, but, most unfortunately for her daughter, she never did wish. Marie, exquisitely turned out by Doucet, would glance at the dilapidated figure at her side, and as her eye fell on worn out shoes, tumbled black dress, and draggled ostrich feathers, wretchedness would envelop her. On this journey to Biarritz Madame Bashkirtseff surpassed herself: 'Yesterday, on the journey, it was really lamentable, an old black tunic that had come unsewn one side (made out of very cheap silk by a little dress-maker) and put on crooked at that. I was forced to make a scene.... Oh! how miserable it is to have quarrels over such absurdities.' And it was not only her mother's appearance that was exasperating. When alone with her family Madame Bashkirtseff would talk naturally, but with strangers she had not the courage to be natural, she would make fatal efforts to be what she thought she ought to be, even her pronunciation underwent a peculiar alteration. And again Marie, watching and listening, writhed in spirit. Aunt Sophie, too, with her knowledge of how to impose herself, sometimes imposed herself too much. Really, at times it was agony to be with *les mères*. And yet, 'it is,' writes Marie, 'a little my own fault. I was always reproaching them for not having known how to get into good society, and would sometimes say disagreeable things to push them into doing something. But the only result has been to give them this pitiable attitude. I am always complaining of my relations, but I love them; I am fair to them.'

After Biarritz, trailing each her depression of spirit with her, the three women went to Spain. The reasons for Marie's depression we know. That of *les mères* was caused by their hourly concern for Marie's health, the fear that by her eager efforts to see everything she would make herself ill. Always by oblique remarks they tried to put her off doing what she wanted to: did the guide say they would find it cold at Burgos, then immediately Burgos became an all but impossible place to

visit—‘What a country! And to go there to see what? The cathedral? But it is only English people who go there!’ All this in the third person, with no direct but every indirect intention to work on Marie.

Arrived in Madrid, Madame Bashkirtseff heard from her husband that he was anxious she should join him at Gavronzi to attend to some business. Farewells were said, and Marie and her Aunt Sophie were left to each other’s company.

If Aunt Sophie had suffered on her niece’s first visit to Berlin from statues and miniatures, she now in Spain suffered as much from caves and coffins: ‘ghastly!’ she would expostulate. Marie, as usual, confided her own endurances to her diary. ‘I understand one can be happy living in one’s family, and alone I should be unhappy. One can go shopping *en famille*, to the bois *en famille*, sometimes to the theatre; one can be ill *en famille*, take cures *en famille*, in fact do everything in life that is intimate . . . but to travel *en famille*!!! One might as well be expected to enjoy valsing with one’s aunt. It is mortally boring and, too, slightly ridiculous.’ About Spain itself Marie chatters on with more enthusiasm than originality.

During a visit to the jail at Granada she was struck with the idea of doing a portrait of one of the prisoners. Officials and criminals were equally flattered at the attention. Marie picked out a particularly villainous looking fellow as her subject, and, on arriving with Rosalie, was shown into a room where was the prisoner, an interpreter, and an official. This official, wishing to give as much pleasure as possible to the prisoners in his charge, had arranged a row of chairs behind Marie, and all the time she painted, relays of men tiptoed in and out, taking possession in turn of these coveted chairs. These constant knockings at the door, demands for admittance, arrivings and retirings, scrapings and scufflings, coupled with the knowledge of a row of staring eyes behind her back did not induce the ideal atmosphere in which to paint. However, it was altogether an interesting experience; though disappointing to find in the end that this man whose revolting crimes she had looked forward to recounting in Paris was in prison merely for having been found in possession of false coins.

At the end of October Marie was back in Paris. The people she really enjoyed seeing after being away were Julien and Tony. 'This dear Tony and this dear Julien, may heaven keep me these two friends for ever.... Oh! what a sweet thing sympathy is.'

Julien urged her to work more steadily, impressing on her that only by so doing could she succeed. As encouragement he held out to her a fantastic project: whether originally formulated by herself or not is not quite clear: 'by work alone,' said Père Julien, 'would she become celebrated, and that then C[assagnac], nearly an old man, worn out by politics, bored by a wife and child, would find himself faced by this brilliant little star, and then she would be able to do what she liked.' There are points in this peculiar programme that seem obscure—but Marie was enchanted. Julien had the tenderest heart: probably he saw further than Marie or her family, and foreseeing what was coming felt the only course to take was to encourage her to occupy herself, and to fill her with a sense of coming happiness in the future. But later on Marie, thinking over his remarks about Cassagnac, saw the weakness of his argument. 'Julien imagines that when we remeet, when I am famous, it is going to reawaken in his heart jealousies, regrets, passions: but as he has never had any feeling for me....' Yes, there it was, how reawaken what had never existed? She realized well enough that though this 'great creature, with his Creole softness and childish mouth beneath his terrific moustache' had during all these years become indissolubly part of the erotic side of her imagination, in reality their two lives would never be reknit. But in these few meetings in the Bashkirtseffs' drawing-room, even though surrounded always by the chatter and disturbance of the family, how completely his being seemed to have been poured into hers! 'He is my arm-chair; he is myself. And I think too he is more a celestial brother than a man I love....' In the world of her mind he lived and companioned her; but in her outside world, there, where he might have been, was an emptiness. At moments when she was jarred by her family she thought of filling this emptiness by marriage—with some man or other: from this new point of view, considering a husband merely as a prop in

the background, who it was did not matter so particularly. She one day mentioned to Julien this idea of marriage so as to escape from her family, and he began to tease her about Tony, ending by asking her seriously whether she would marry him. Actually the idea had at intervals crossed her mind, but: 'She has married her tutor!—that is what would be said of her, and instant on the thought her mind winced away.

However, another marriage connected with the studio was imminent. Amélie's long siege of Julien's heart had at last succeeded: her supreme effort to procure him the Cross of the Legion of Honour had not been fruitless. Marie did not at all like the news, for Tony and Julien had become part of the furniture of her life: 'it is tiresome, it takes away a confidant, a support.' She was so annoyed that, with her usual petulant rushing to extremes, she even thought of marrying Dina to Julien. 'Why not? He is decorated and makes a lot of money. It would, at any rate, keep him in the family.' But a moment's reflection showed her the impossibility of the scheme. 'It is a chimera, first, because the implacable Amélie is unescapable, and in the next place because she would be too unhappy, and however disgusting she may be I should not have the heart.' No, the marriage had to be faced: the devoted if unappetising Amélie must be left with her Julien in peace. Apart from this annoyance Marie was happily saturated in the subtle charm of an autumnal Paris, 'I am plunged in a ravishing sense of well-being. Paris, its elegances, its soft atmosphere, the boulevards, the pneumatic bells . . . with what pleasure one sees it all again, how soothing it is, how one enters into possession of oneself. . . . Blessed be journeys that give one these sweetneses of returning.' She would, she decided, go to the Chamber to hear Gambetta and perhaps see Cassagnac, and to go there she would wear a Louis XV dress, she would wear a grey felt hat, she would wear a bunch of Bengal roses pinned high up near her shoulder, the whole '*bien Parisien*'. 'Several times I have found myself smiling all to myself thinking of tomorrow, of the sitting, of the grey toilette, and the bunch of roses, and my air of happiness.' Yes, in spite of all and everything, there was satisfaction at times in being alive.

Bojidar came in one evening, and helped her to nail up in

her studio the pieces of embroidery she had brought from Spain. 'Oh! how good it is to be in the bosom of one's family! By family I mean inanimate objects!'

And then, treading on the heels of this serenity, came disaster. Marie's health was again all to pieces. Potain came to see her. She was examined by the equally great Charcot. 'If,' so he informed her, 'you spend the winter in Paris you are dead.' She must take the greatest care of herself, she must go to the south. To the south when she had just come back from there! When she was just settling down to paint, settling down to continue her fight! 'It's impossible to imagine how desperate this exodus to the south is for me.... I who came back drunk with the idea of keeping quiet and of working, working steadily without intermission....' 'Their *Midi*... if Julien hadn't come in I should have wept the whole evening with rage. Very well! So much the worse, but I will not go to their *Midi*. Then I must die, die here in the midst of life. And I know it [to go south] is practically indispensable, but it rends me, makes me desperate.'

And Aunt Sophie was behaving in a tiresome way. She could not be blamed for sending off a batch of panic telegrams to Madame Bashkirtseff and Dina—who appear at this juncture to have been in Russia—but unfortunately she could not resist going round to all their friends in Paris and telling them how seriously ill her niece was. She positively could not resist the pleasure of a little dramatizing the situation. And these secret activities of Aunt Sophie would startlingly and most annoyingly be revealed to Marie. Joseph Saint-Arnaud, one night dining with the Bashkirtseffs, suddenly burst out, 'But I think you're looking splendid, yesterday your aunt terrified me! I found her in tears and she told me you had a fever and were very ill, I was going to rush away—thinking the child was in her death agony.... Not at all, merely just back from the studio!'

Another day the bell rang, Aunt Sophie went into another room to see who it was who had come: the Ganinis rushed forward.

“Well! Dear child what is the matter with you? Ah, *mon Dieu!*”

“But I am quite well, nothing's the matter with me.”

Then a stupefied glance from the couple to my aunt who had had time to whisper that I was very ill.’

And only three days before Marie had begged Aunt Sophie to keep quiet on the subject. ‘Well, yes, I am ill,’ Marie had admitted, ‘but . . . I implore you, do not proclaim it on the housetops; everyone thinks I look well, and I am up and about, don't undeceive them.... That is the prayer of a nearly maddened invalid, if you like . . . look after me, but don't talk about it. It's not even interesting, you don't understand what it means to me in sadness, humiliation, suffering.’

During these weeks when Marie could not leave the house Julien came again to see her. But Père Julien was different to usual—not natural, and giving vent to little spurts of forced gaiety which at once revealed to Marie how ill he thought her. However, the one thing that really mattered to her was that this illness was keeping her from her painting. ‘Ah, it is so cruel of God. I used to have annoyances, family upsets, but those did not, so to speak, reach to the very depths of my being—and then enormous hopes.... I lose my voice—first personal attack, finally I get used to it, I become resigned.... Ah! as you have reconciled yourself to all this, very good! Now you're going to have taken from you the very means of working!

‘Neither a study nor a picture, and the set-back of an entire winter; I who had put my whole life into my work—only those who have been in my place can understand.’ ‘I used to think God had left me my painting and I had shut myself into it as a final refuge. And now that fails me, and all I can do is to ruin my eyes by weeping.... Oh, God, hear me, give me strength, take pity on me!’ And all this time she was aware of Breslau like a menacing figure in the background: Breslau the strong, Breslau the capable, Breslau the brilliant. In a word Breslau the rival who had beaten her. ‘I dare not ask anything for fear of hearing what Breslau is doing.’

Sometimes, alone in her own room in the evening, she would take the earlier parts of her diary out of the white box where she kept it, and as she turned the pages the present would

become less insistent, would fade and disappear . . . and back again would come the early days at Nice—herself and the Sopogenikoffs, laughter-shaken children to whom, themselves so newly created, all creation had seemed radiantly new. ‘*O Nice, O Midi, Méditerranée!*’—the sun-drenched parade, the garden stuffed with scent, the fountain tossing its water-plumes into the air. Back into her mind would come their ridiculous, their entrancing jokes, the jingles they made up about them . . . wait! one was coming back now: yes, this was how it went:

*Ah! c'est bien étonnant!*  
*Ah! c'est bien surprenant!*  
*Qui! me dira comment,*  
*Fil! nit cet incident,*  
*Ah! c'est bien étonnant!*

She looked up from the page: a trance-like stillness lay over the room, ‘I give way to my imagination, I dream! And then I pull myself up, and it is always the same silence, the same solitude, the same room. . . . Blue satin [chair covers], these violets, and the light falling from above, the harp. . . . Not a sound, no one.’ ‘The immobility of the furniture seems like a provocation, a mockery. I am here fighting in a nightmare while other people live!’ And the surprising, the unwelcome truth would force itself on her, the fact that, with all her endeavours, all her strivings and strainings, she had never found any happiness to equal those early days at Nice; those days when she would wake in the morning to find her room blotched with sunshine while outside gently the sea swished: those days when life lay before her like a flowered meadow and every bird sang ring-a-ding.

Looking out of her window one day Marie saw Bertha driving up to the door in a landau with yellow wheels, and showily liveried servants. This Bertha of the early Cassagnac days, this Bertha who always unmasked too quickly, had come to ask how her friend was. Bertha had married one of the Pagets,

but, neglected by her husband, who paid marked attention to her mother and none to her, she became reckless: scandal had smirched her, and only narrowly had she escaped entire shipwreck. However, fortune had relented, useful friends came forward and Bertha had been socially resuscitated. The landau, the showy liveries were an outward sign of her reordered existence; within this equestrian splendour she was being trotted back into security.

Marie knew all the details of her friend's career. Bertha had taken social risks that she, Marie, had not, and yet how triumphantly Bertha had come through! There was no denying that of the two she was now more of a show piece than was Marie: and this 'after being seen at Nice in public with cocottes, and the Blanc scandal; some people have luck, don't they?' comments Marie.

Meanwhile, Constantin had reappeared. Finding his daughter so physically and mentally distraught he a shade tactlessly offered her his usual panacea: a visit to Gavronzi. 'Just imagine! he had the idea of carrying us off to the country for Easter! No, it is too much... with my health to talk of taking me to Russia in February or March!'

The truth is that Constantin was always anxious now to get his family to be with him at Gavronzi. As we already know, Constantin was ill himself, his pace had a little slackened, his outlook a trifle altered. At present, far from flying from his wife, he liked her company. Even Marie admitted, 'he adores Mama, he swears he has never loved anyone but her; further, she has done everything so that they should live together... further... briefly, for three years it's been a love *ménage*. Mama, if annoying, is good-natured, and papa is a charming man, agreeable, amusing, though egotistical and brusque. To sum up, I am touched at this tardy harmoniousness.' For during the last few years, besides Constantin coming to Paris, Madame Bashkirtseff had, it seems, been much at Gavronzi. Now on this further visit to his family, Constantin settled down with them for several months. On the whole Marie found him an addition to the household. If he

was not outstandingly intelligent there was at least a masculine grip in his conversation which was a relief after the customary fuddle of talk between Madame Bashkirtseff and Aunt Sophie. Then, too, he knew a good many people in Paris: by having him with them the family position was decidedly strengthened.

Towards the end of the year Marie gradually grew better. She was able to go out, to work a little. Not only Constantin, but Paul's wife too was staying with them, and Marie did a portrait of her. The last day of the year Marie took this painting to Tony to hear his opinion. 'The very sympathetic Tony was highly enchanted to see me in good health, and after some gay chatter we approached the very grave subject of art and of Breslau.' 'Certainly her picture is very good,' admitted Tony, 'she is highly gifted.' If anything had been needed to sting Marie to renewed efforts here was the necessary lash. 'Oh, this sheet of paper is incapable of expressing what I feel! All the fire, the fever.... Oh, to work night and day, the whole time, the whole time, and do something really good!!! I know he says that when the day comes that I want to I shall do as well as she has.... But the question is, am I capable? Ah! Tony has confidence in me, but I have no confidence.... I am eaten up with the longing to do well and I know my powerlessness....

'Ah! Seigneur! I...spend my time hunting for a literary manner of expressing my annoyances while Breslau, less foolish, draws and works!'

So her year ends.

## 16

Solidity having now been given to the family by the presence of Constantin, the Bashkirtseffs decided to give a ball. Within a week two hundred and fifty invitations flew from the Bashkirtseffs, and in response two hundred and fifty replies came flying back. All promised well. Those whom the Bashkirtseffs specially wished to come were coming. Doucet under Marie's directions was making her a dress of white silk muslin and satin copied from the one worn by the girl in Greuze's *Broken Pitcher*. Madame Bashkirtseff, Aunt Sophie, and Dina were

also busily being draped and furbelowed for the occasion. The *Figaro* whipped up interest in the party by adroit admiration of Marie's looks, and prowess as a painter. The Coquelins, father and son, were coming to the ball, and two days before the party itself Coquelin *ainé* came to see the rooms and give his opinion as to the arrangements: 'All well-known, celebrated people,' writes Marie, 'whether man or woman, old or young, have a certain tone of voice, a certain manner which is the same in all of them, and which I shall call "the manner of the family of the famous."'

The day came: the new dresses were put on: the band arrived clasping, of that we may be certain, the valses of Strauss: the guests came crowding in: the rooms filled, and to the leaping notes of violin and piano these *élégantes* of the eighties went revolving and twirling between the lights and the flowers. Everything fitted together into an enchanting mosaic of success. Marie certainly had made the slight mistake of inviting her doctor, 'le sous-Potain,' as she calls him; a mistake because he spent his evening in pursuit of this dancing Greuze figure urging her not to overture herself, not to go on dancing. But he was only a pursuing shadow: she escaped him and was off again. . . . Out into the air, undulating and curveting, came the valse of Strauss, filling the room with what vistas, what visions—cloud-pillars uprearing; sprays of blossom out-tossing; patterns forming, dissolving . . . and now the vertiginous swing and sway . . . the pause . . . the heart-breaking repeat (but what ecstasy of heart-breaking). And now a spatter of bird notes above diaphanous flowers that out-breathe and vanish: now a little phrase that with delicate dip and twirl and curtsey seduces the heart to tenderness: now close-whispered, murmuring solace—water that ripples, ripples . . . and then again the vertiginous swing and sway . . . the pause . . . the repeat. . . .

This surely is not the familiar drawing-room of the *rue Ampère*—these walls are not the usual walls but only the mere necessary surround to enclose this dazzle of unreal that yet seems the real: this stretch of shining floor the mere necessary foothold for these Mercury-winged feet that glide and spin. For these few music-embroidered hours all Marie's griefs

were forgotten: the valses of Strauss took them, played with them, tossed them in the air, dispersed them, dissolved them to nothingness, and instead, lightly, insinuatingly, imposed their own world of gossamer joy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three o'clock in the morning found the Bashkirtseffs and the remaining sixty guests having supper: the Bashkirtseffs filled with the tired, happy exhilaration of hosts who have given a party that has been one gay blaze of success, a party that has had great *chic*, that could not have been bettered.

### 17

It was very shortly after the ball that Marie first met the artist, Bastien-Lepage, now a man of about thirty-four. Later, considering the part he came to play in her life, she must have looked back in her diary with interest at her description of this first meeting when a friend had taken her one Saturday to Bastien-Lepage's studio to see his pictures. '*Ce Bastien*,' she writes, 'gives the impression of a good-natured little fellow very pleased with himself.' It was a summary description that, when she came to know him better, must have struck her as peculiarly crude, peculiarly lacking in perception.

Like her, Bastien-Lepage had all his life been fired with ambition, but, unlike her, with ambition within the scope of his powers. From his earliest days as a village boy at Damvillers he had wished to paint. Backed by the devotion and encouragement of his family, he had fought his way in Paris from incredible poverty to success. By his particular genre, paintings of peasants, he had unwittingly founded a new school, and was now one of the foremost artists in Paris.

When one first looks at a portrait of Bastien-Lepage that coarse peasant air, the bluntness of feature, are so pronounced that for an instant one's mind winces, but as one looks closer, the face undergoes a change, the peasant is blotted out by the mystic. Those eyes reflect, not what they look out upon but some vision within, and from these pondering eyes a veil of

the most tender sensibility falls over the rest of the features. Gradually as one looks one realizes that this clumsy face of a peasant was merely the rough lodging that housed a Christ.

Bastien-Lepage's sense of life was as intense as Marie's, but his happiness was drawn from subtler sources. Wherever his eye fell, that on which it fell yielded up to him its secret; he was an interpreter of spiritual values, of the real within the apparent. His life was arduous, and emotionally exciting. Gradually his mind, far finer and more penetrating than hers, was to work on Marie's, to open up for her vistas hitherto unknown to her. But this awakening was only to come by degrees.

Ten days after she had been to Bastien-Lepage's studio he came to hers. She showed him her paintings, and he softened the severity of the advice that he gave by telling her that she had great talent. While he was there Madame de Péronny—who was on the staff of the *Figaro*—arrived, and, writes Marie, 'I spent a charming quarter of an hour with this superior woman and this great artist in front of my mantelpiece, and then beneath the palm tree, swelling with vanity and pleasure. I did not take any notice of the other visitors whom I had left in the official drawing-room with Mama.'

But intimacy between Marie and Bastien-Lepage was not to be yet. The Bashkirtseffs were going at the end of this January of 1882 to the Nice carnival, and for the moment this filled Marie's mind. They were going a large party. Marie's father and mother, Paul and his wife, Dina, Princess Eristoff, and Bojidar. Bojidar was good in Paris but in a carnival he was superb; he was revealed as an expert in *blague*; one evening dancing the *cancan* for a quarter of an hour in front of another reveller, achieving, with gauze-like lightness, that which to the Saxon is almost impossible—the expression of an attitude of mind so subtle, so tenuous, that though it has meaning, and the most enchanting meaning, it escapes all definition.

But beneath all this confetti-gaiety Marie was harassed by thoughts of her neglected career. Ten lines of praise of Breslau's work that she came across in a paper overwhelmed her. 'It was such a cruel blow that for three days I was really wretched.' Illness too had taken from her her mainspring of energy:

first, enforced inactivity; then the dissipation of mind engendered in a successful ball-giver; this followed in its turn by the hilarity of a carnival reveller—these things had fatally broken up the quiet mental concentration necessary for the production of good work. ‘If you knew the torments I go through! I fight against laziness and this terrible “it will be a failure” that stops me doing anything. And I have piercing remorse for every lost hour.... And when I see the drawings in the *Vie Moderne* I turn red and then pale.... Oh! what a terrible and dangerous moment it is when one leaves the regular and mechanical work of the studio... to be given up to one’s own devices, to realize what one ought to do, to know what is lacking. *To be aware of one’s condition!*’

The Bashkirtseffs stayed on at Nice till the middle of April, and Marie did in the end accomplish a good deal of work: several paintings as well as studies and drawings. When they were back in Paris, Tony came to see them. Her family had been so impressed by these Nice paintings that Marie had caught their optimism, and hoped for, almost expected, that Tony would give her, so she says, ‘a long tirade on my extraordinary ability.’ What did happen was that he glanced now at one now at another of her efforts, let fall plenty of ‘very goods’ and ‘quite goods’, and now and then more detailed appreciation at the same level, but of the expected clamour of praise no sign. Also there was almost a suggestion of hurry in his manner; he had, as she knew, come in on his way to a committee meeting at the Salon, but all the same she felt he might have looked at her work a shade more carefully. Her mother and Aunt Sophie were waiting in the drawing-room, and when Tony came down he was persuaded to come in for a glass of Marsala and a cup of broth. *Les mères* watched him as he drank, and waited for the expected burst of enthusiasm over Marie’s work. But the only words that came from him were hurried thanks for the Marsala and the broth: and off he rushed.

‘He is an idiot and knows nothing,’ tersely remarked Aunt Sophie; whilst Madame Bashkirtseff, seeing her daughter’s downcast face, tried to belittle the value of Tony’s opinion by saying that she was surprised at Marie seeming ‘so upset’. A few days later Marie went to the Sunday picture varnishing

at the Salon. Owing to her illness she had not been able to send in any pictures, but naturally Breslau had. Marie wandered round looking for Breslau's painting: there it was, not on the line but high up, and in consequence the general effect of it 'deplorable'. 'I had been so worried over the success I felt she was going to have that it is a great relief; I won't deny it.... If her picture had been as I had imagined, it would have been the end of me.... in this piteous condition which my work has got into,... I did not for one instant wish that it should be bad, that would be mean, but I was so trembling at the idea of seeing an outburst of over-powering success; I was in such a state on opening the papers that God had perhaps had pity on me....'

For experience had not dimmed her certainty that the Almighty took, more than for others, a special interest in the affairs of Marie Bashkirtseff.

## 18

During the June of this year Marie found existence more tolerable. She formed a friendship, if only a slight one, with Carolus Duran, 'Happy Carolus Duran, who is celebrated and believes himself the most sublime artist of all time.' Such sunshine of self-satisfaction emanated from him that other people felt warmed by its rays, 'one is not annoyed by him, on the contrary.' The Bashkirtseffs gave a most successful dinner that Carolus came to. The *Figaro* and the *Clarion* mentioned this dinner: a Paris hostess whom Marie refers to as the *Duchesse de F.*.... took Marie up, chiefly, so it seems, in the rôle of a rich heiress who might conveniently 'regild some coat-of-arms', but still she did take her up, and Marie suddenly found herself a welcomed figure in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Arrived at a party at the *Duchesse de F.*'s, Marie's eye, trained now to all the different social nuances of Paris, glanced round with approval: 'everything that is most *chic*: the real *monde*, young girls, fresh and ravishing. Real toilettes.... The names I heard pronounced are the best known and the most aristocratic, and the few people I knew are everything that is most *élégante*.' It was as if the cornucopia

that holds the joys of this world had suddenly shaken out on her a shower of its bright-coloured fruits: 'I am a little giddy at the realization all in a moment of the dreams that have cost me so many tears' . . . 'at last I have entered into this dreamed-of happiness, and where? In Paris!! . . . The arts, the Faubourg Saint-Germain, intelligence etc., literature etc., celebrated men . . . is it possible? And if I did not fear to break the spell I should say I am very happy.'

But this surround of appreciation was no good if she herself did not stand out as a brilliant individual: she did not wish to be run after merely as one of a group of heiresses suitable to marry. 'I must produce something that will make them jump with astonishment, nothing else will bring me peace of mind. . . .' She must, in fact, create a masterpiece: but how produce a masterpiece when she could not work? 'The other day with Julien we talked about it; he said that for a year and a half I had done nothing; now here, now there, a month of travel, then working by fits and starts, then nothing!!'

After her successful dinner party Marie had had qualms that during that particular evening she had not perhaps shown enough attention to Julien and Tony, and, a day or so after, she had gone round to pay them little visits so as to erase any impression of the sort. But Julien was rather ready to take offence, and possibly at this moment his criticism of her painting was tinctured by personal annoyance. Whether this was the case or no Marie herself realized only too well the unsettled condition she was in. 'I have tried to go back to the studio and I was not able to. Shall I be able to work alone? . . . I'm incapable of doing a simple study.'

To add to the difficulty of setting to work, the Bashkirtseffs were again in the throes of house-moving. As might be guessed, it was Marie who had instigated it. The new house was number 30 *rue Ampère*. Marie was to have a whole floor to herself: studio, library, three other rooms, and a balcony. There was also a garden where she would be able to do open-air studies. When she had first seen it, 30 *rue Ampère* had seemed to her the most desirable of possessions, but once the lease was taken all sorts of objections to it rose in her mind. That chilling experience was upon her of possessing a thing

urdently desired and finding that the very fact of possession lowered its value. 'Well, it is settled, and no going back on it. We can have the house and here I am quite cooled off. It seems to me it is out of the way, that the studio is not large, that it is dear, and I am wretched, oh but wretched to leave the *Champs Elysées*.... And then all the moving is as upsetting as anything can be. And to leave these rooms where I have been so peaceful....

'Oh! well! It's done now, signed at the solicitors.'

In the midst of this upheaval she and Dina went round once or twice to Bastien-Lepage's studio for Marie to do a small portrait of his architect brother, Emile; Bastien-Lepage himself being in London. '*I am painting on the real Bastien's own palette, with his colours, his brush, his studio, and his brother for model.*' She scraped off the palette, to keep as a treasured possession, a little bit of dried paint that Bastien had left there, and the others laughed to see how her hand trembled. 'We spent a charming hour laughing, talking, and making sketches, and everything so *convenable*.... If I had heard all this of Breslau, I should be lamenting and envying her her surroundings. Well, I have got what I want, does it give me talent?'

But forming in her mind was a great project for a picture that would, she felt, make just the sensation that she wished, emphasize her in the public eye in the way she needed emphasizing. Not that the subject itself was sensational: on the contrary. The painting was to be the Marys gazing into the empty sepulchre.

The thought of this picture took complete possession of her. She talked of it to Julien, to Tony: she lay awake thinking of it: unable to sleep, at three o'clock she got up and wrote in her diary her feelings on the overwhelming subject with the preliminary sketches in front of her, (but, she writes, 'perhaps it's the two cups of tea I had this evening that have prevented my sleeping.') In imagination she saw her picture at the Salon, she saw the crowd of people in front of it: and at the thought she felt the perspiration on her skin. 'On one hand,' she explains, 'I feel a kind of fear and on the other—"It depends on myself."' There were moments now when she more

dreaded than hoped that the Almighty would intervene in her earthly affairs, and as she pondered on her picture misgiving invaded her. ‘Oh my God, I fall on my knees and implore you not to oppose yourself to this happiness. It is in all humility, prostrate, in the dust, that I beg you to . . . not even to help me, deign only to allow that I work without too many obstacles.’

\* \* \* \* \*

This year, walking along the streets on warm summer evenings Marie was struck by the charm of Paris street life at that hour when work is over, when the day lies like a spent wave, and there is a hush, a lull, before the incoming tide of night. In the country this hour has its own beauty, but in a teeming city this moment of calm after the day’s clamour touches the mind to a special awareness. This summer evening lethargy of the Paris streets had not before meant anything to Marie, but now it was suddenly revealed. ‘The street!’ ‘Coming back from Robert Fleury we walked along the avenues round the *Arc de Triomphe* . . . about half-past six: . . . the concierges, the children, the errand boys, the workmen, the women: all of them at their doors, on the benches, or gossiping in front of the public houses . . . a bench in the street with several little girls talking and playing together . . . then a table at a *café* with two men . . . the mistress of the *café* leaning in the shadow of the door. And then, by the Temple, a very fair young girl leaning laughing in her shop, a shop for funeral wreaths.’ Seen from this new point of view, how inexpressibly beautiful, how curiously exciting it was, all dipped in the ambient dusty languor of a summer’s evening.

In Boucher’s canvas, *The Setting of the Sun*, we see this poised hour between day and night enmeshed in the sky, this hour as known to the gods. This youthful Apollo who, just leapt from his chariot, has fallen into an attitude of breath-taking beauty; these languid, outstretched nymphs couched on their slow-drifting clouds are steeped in the same spell of enchanted appeasement as at this hour are the inhabitants of the earth below; as were the Paris midinettes, the concierges, and the shopkeepers seen by Marie.

This autumn of 1882 Madame Bashkirtseff and Dina went to Gavronzi, and Marie and Aunt Sophie were left together in Paris. Determined now steadily to pursue her painting, Marie lived a life of daily, patient work. For the moment we hear no more of the delights of society as provided by the *Duchesse de F.*.... 'The days,' Marie wrote at the end of September, 'follow each other and resemble each other: from eight to five, painting; a good hour for my bath before dinner, then a silent dinner; I read the papers. Only an occasional word exchanged between me and my aunt. She must be very bored, poor thing! and really it's not very nice of me; she has had nothing, for she was always sacrificed to Mama who was beautiful, and now she only lives for us, for me, and I cannot bring myself to be gay and agreeable for the rare moments when we are together—and I am pleased with a silence during which I don't think of my infirmities.' 'If you knew what continual suffering are these efforts to hear!' Certainly by this silence she could forget her deafness, but it was decidedly hard on Aunt Sophie. The truth is Marie was at this time in despair over her painting. 'R[obert] F[leury] tells me he has talked about me with Julien, of my endeavours, my ambitions. Well, yesterday they were sorry for me and they came to the conclusion . . . that it would be a good thing if I did simple studies at the studio; that the difficulties of out-of-doors are beyond my present powers and that this discourages me. He told me this so carefully that it was all I could do not to cry....

'As for my picture . . . I did not even dare mention it—it's as if the air had turned into lead and was drawing the skin of my face down towards the earth. . . . As I complain, as I have been stupid enough to let them see the extent of my ambitions, these two men can but give me sensible advice, realizing that for me it is neither a game nor a pastime and that I feel desperate about it. So, like two honest doctors, they order me drastic remedies....

'And for a year I have suffered martyrdom. Cruel sufferings, I assure you; to lose the good opinion one had of oneself, confidence, courage, hope. To work only with the horrible con-

viction that it will lead to nothing—that is what paralyses one! And nothing can uplift me again except a good canvas . . . and that, in this disastrous state of mind is impossible.' If her silence at dinner is not exonerated it is at least explained.

Meanwhile her mother wrote her from Gavronzi that two young Russian princes—brothers, whose name we are not given—were coming to stay close by, and were going 'to organize great hunting expeditions'. These two young men were also, it seems, extremely well off. Should Marie go to Gavronzi or should she not? If she went she would miss all chance of doing a picture for the Salon. On the other hand these young men were great partis. She was 'plunged in an ocean of uncertainties'. In the end, in despair as she was over her painting, she decided for Gavronzi.

By the middle of October she was there. Victor, the elder of the princes, was thin and dark, he had an aquiline nose, thick lips, and on the whole Marie found him fairly sympathetic. Basil was big, fair, a red face, and '*ma foi*, yes, common'. Nearer acquaintance did not make these two boys any more attractive. Their coachman being one day drunk, Basil, who happened to have his spurs on, went out and gave him a good kicking. 'This boy is horrible!' comments Marie. Nor were these rough young men particularly attracted by Marie. With her usual acumen she realized that for them, 'as a woman of the world I am not any more charming than lots of others.'

One evening, fireworks being let off in the garden, the hen house inadvertently caught fire. The whole party rushed out of doors with the intention of rescuing the hens. Here was all the thrill of a house on fire without any of the danger. The evening turned into a bacchanale of flames, hilarity, and screams of laughter. The great trees that stood round, a moment before wrapped in obscurity but now suddenly flood-lit by the glowing shed, were startlingly revealed in their gigantic beauty. As the hen house crackled and the flames uproared before Marie's eyes all ordinary values were for these exquisite moments displaced, the sense of living quickened to incredible speed. These uprushing tongues of fire, these hurtling, laughing, shouting, bawling, scrambling figures; all these familiar faces fiercely lit by that blaze of fire; these mimic heroes rescuing

the squawking hens; and all the time to sight and sense the calm, melodramatic beauty of the illumined trees—it filled Marie with an enchantment of happiness.

If Constantin had plotted for weeks before how to entertain his house-party he could never have hit on anything so effective.

While in Russia Marie and her family paid a visit to Uncle Alexander and Aunt Nadine at Madame Bashkirtseff's old home, Tcherniakoff. 'I played on the piano,' writes Marie, 'in the great drawing-room, white and empty, and I thought of grandmama who used to listen ensconced in her room at the end of the long, long corridor.... Ah! if only one could make the old people live again how one would look after them! Grandmama had nothing but suffering....

'To-night we had one of those delightful evenings again like there used to be when Mama reigned there. All the candles lit, all the doors open, seven very big drawing-rooms, and they seemed quite full though we weren't more than sixteen.'

In November Marie was back in Paris.

It was now that one of the worst blows of her life fell on her. Much as she had suffered from her deafness she had always had the hope that in time it would disappear. This November she was told definitely that she would never be cured. All she could expect was that by taking infinite trouble, by constant treatment 'it might be made a shade better'. At the doctor's, 'For the first time,' she writes, 'I had the courage to say: "Monsieur, I am becoming deaf." Up to now I have made use of, "I don't hear very well, my ears are stopped up, etc." This time I dared to say this terrible thing and the doctor replied with a surgeon's brutality.

'Why,' she goes on, 'does one say God is good, God is just? 'Then I'm never going to be cured.... It can be borne, but there will be a veil between me and the rest of the world. The wind in the branches, the murmur of water, the rain falling on the window-panes... words pronounced in a low voice... of all that I shall hear nothing....

'So from now on I shall be less than anybody, incomplete, disabled... I so proud, I shall have to go red and feel self-diffluent every instant.

'I write this so as to impress it on myself, but I still don't

believe it—it is utterly horrible . . . so cruel, so incredible. . . . Yes, everyone knows it or will know it, all those who already have so enjoyed running me down. . . . She is deaf.'

She tried to joke to herself about it—'Don't let us trouble ourselves beforehand with the tiles that God holds in reserve for his humble servant,' but, no, it was beyond joking over. 'The one thing that for me was the most necessary and precious is damaged.' 'Oh, God, why suddenly this awful, terrible, atrocious thing?'

If Julien had realized the atmosphere of despair that at present enveloped her he perhaps would not have chosen this very moment to lash her over her painting. Her work this week was, she writes, 'so bad that myself I can't understand it. Julien called me in to him and said such useless things to me, so cruel . . . so . . . I don't understand it. . . . Perhaps he thinks it will drive me on to work, on the contrary it has annihilated me: for three hours I was quite done for, my hands fumbling, my arms on fire.' ('Oh God, give me the strength of mind to do nothing but studies, because everyone's advice is that one must become master of one's craft . . . I argue so reasonably, and I haven't the strength of mind . . . What are six months? can't I be patient for six months and give up everything that would amuse me so as to paint. . . .?')

Bastien-Lepage again came to see the Bashkirtseffs. 'The only, the unique, the great Bastien-Lepage came to-day,' writes Marie. When he actually came into her studio to see her work she felt 'clumsy and confused': after all, what had she to show this man whose opinion she valued more than that of any other? But she need not have distressed herself. He stayed two hours: he was interested, he was kind: if he did not praise, he at least did not discourage. 'This great artist was very good-natured; he tried to calm me. . . . Bastien does not treat me as a society girl; he says the same as Tony Robert Fleury, the same as Julien, only without those horrible jokes of Julien who says that all is over, that I shall do nothing more, that I am done for. It is that that maddens me.'

A certain Miss Richards had given Marie her album in the hope she would do a sketch in it, and during the visit of Bastien-Lepage Marie disinterestedly asked him to do a sketch

for her friend. As he drew he noticed the drawing was marking the page underneath, and was going to put a piece of paper between, when Marie exclaimed, 'Leave it, leave it, that will give her two.' 'I don't know,' she continues, 'why I work for Richards' happiness, sometimes it amuses me to give a great pleasure to someone who isn't expecting it.'

The next week Bastien and his brother came to dinner. The Bashkirtseffs had invited no one else, and before the arrival of the brothers Marie had qualms. Was it too intimate asking them like this the first time? Would this mixing of Lepages and Bashkirtseffs with no other flavouring end in boredom? But it all went off charmingly; and later in the evening Bojidar looked in for a moment, 'very pleased to meet Bastien.'

Before the year ended Marie had further revelations from her doctor. 'I am a consumptive,' she announces, 'he told me so to-day.' She had announced this fact in her diary before, but, it seems, more as a surmise than a certainty. Now all uncertainty was dispelled. She was surprised more than alarmed, but as she came down the doctor's staircase she noticed her knees were shaking. This feeling of astonishment continued. She would not tell her family, it was not her habit to confide in them; but as usual in any crisis she discussed the situation in her diary. If she could live ten more years, and in those years know success and love she would, she decided, die content. But to live as long as this she must consent to have her shoulder blistered, and to that she had objections. She had told the doctor so: 'He replied that I shall regret it, and that never in his life had he seen such an extraordinary invalid.' 'I am,' writes Marie, 'very calm but a little astonished to be the only one in the secret of my ills.' Astonishment gave way to amusement. She felt she would like to talk it over with someone, and Julien seems to have been the only person she considered safe: she was not going to take the risk of Aunt Sophie trumpeting the news all over Paris. Julien came to dinner, and Marie, seizing her opportunity when she found herself alone with him for a moment, pointed at her throat and chest, and gave a significant nod. Julien, as he looked at this girl in front of him, to all appearance breathing youth and health, could not believe what she implied. He tried to reassure her by citing

people he knew who had received erroneous verdicts from their doctors, but in the end he positively could not resist asking what she thought now of the way heaven treated her.

'What I think of it? Not very much.'

But he persisted: could her faith stand against this staggering blow, did she still think there was 'something' in it all?

'Yes, it's possible.'

*'Tiens!'* she exclaimed in her diary that evening, 'this position of being sentenced amuses me, or very nearly. It is a situation, it has an element of thrill; I contain a mystery, death has touched me with his finger; there is a certain charm in it. . . . It is interesting and, I repeat, it amuses me. It's tiresome that I can't very well have any other public than my confessor Julien.'

She would, she decided, submit to the blistering: when she went out in the evening, she could, she thought, hide the place with a spray of flowers or some lace. Death itself did not in the least disturb her, but thinking it over she came to the conclusion that on the whole she would, in spite of everything, prefer to live. At any rate for a short time longer. Her mind still working along the same infantile grooves regarding the actions of the Almighty she evolved the theory that He had graciously decided to remove her from a world where He now saw she could not attain supreme happiness. 'God, not being able to give me what would make life possible, removes me from it by killing me. . . . I have already told you that I should have to die, it could not go on, this thirst for everything, these colossal aspirations . . . I told you so before, years ago, at Nice, when I had still only a vague glimpse of all that I must have so as to live.'

Her thoughts turned back to the eternal, the all absorbing subject: painting. 'When I am not working, everything deserts me, when painting, I feel I am stoking up my happiness; inactive, everything stops: night and silence.' She did, this winter, accomplish a pastel that drew praise even from Julien. ('I wanted to throw my arms round his neck.') But it was the thought of the picture of the Marys, the picture that was to astonish, that made her tremble; so nervous was she that she would not be able to accomplish it. 'Ah! *Seigneur*, if only I could believe that by working I shall succeed! That

would give me courage. But at present I feel I shall never be able to.'

The last day of the year she went to an art exhibition where were paintings by Cazin and Bastien-Lepage, and sculptures by Saint-Marceaux. She went from picture to statue, from statue to picture, alight with enthusiasm, and that evening her genuine æsthetic excitement over what she had seen poured itself on to the pages of her diary. Positively she must possess a picture by Bastien, and a statue by Saint-Marceaux!

She went to bed, and next morning when she woke it was the year 1883, the last whole year of her life.

## 20

The early days of January brought, after an attack by an assassin, the death of Gambetta. The outburst of grief from the nation coupled with her own personal admiration for the man so affected Marie that she could not work. 'To read the papers full of Gambetta constricts my head as if it was in an iron band; the patriotic tirades, the sonorous words: patriot, great citizen, national mourning!... I can't work; I have tried, I would like to have forced myself to....

'They have brought the coffin to the *Palais*, the President of the Chamber received it. "I thank you for having brought him here," he said to Spuller, dissolving into tears... the austere, solemn Brisson in tears! He was not his friend. "I thank you for having brought him here!" In that there is real emotion that no play could ever give.'

The Bashkirtseffs went to the Serbian minister's house to see the funeral procession go by of this man who was himself, writes Marie, 'the Republic, Paris, France, youth, the arts.' For over two hours the procession passed and passed, the slow, scuffling feet of the mourners making, to quote Marie, 'a sound like a rain of tears.' 'There has never,' she goes on, 'been anything like it: the music, the flowers... the children turned by the sun, in this slight mist, into figures in an apotheosis. This golden vapour and the flowers made one think of the inconceivable convoy of some young god.... Really

this man filled France and nearly Europe. The whole world must feel someone is missing.'

And in the apt splendour of that last sentence one realizes the possibilities that lay within Marie's mind.

After Gambetta's death Bastien-Lepage had done a portrait of him as he lay on his bed. Now that he was buried, Bastien-Lepage still worked at the canvas, and one day this January Emile Bastien-Lepage took Marie and Dina to Gambetta's house, *Villa d'Avray*, to see his brother at work. Marie gazed in astonishment at Gambetta's miserable little bedroom: the low ceiling, the cheap wall paper, the dilapidated red curtains: these then were the surroundings of the man who had been blamed for his luxurious way of living! Bastien-Lepage was painting at the foot of the bed where still lay the sheets and the flowers. As Bastien worked he talked to Dina, and Marie watched him. 'I am,' she writes, 'a shade embarrassed when I'm with him. Though he has the physique of a young man of twenty-five he has that good-natured serenity without any affectation that one sees in great men—Victo Hugo for example. I shall end by thinking him beautiful; anyhow he possesses that infinite charm of people who are important and powerful and who know it without any conceit or nonsense.'

It was a curious fate that even momentarily grouped Marie, Dina, and Bastien-Lepage in this shabby little room round the bed of Gambetta with its crumpled sheets and wilting flowers; but life's swirling currents do occasionally form such incongruous groups in most unexpected places. Who, experiencing this, finding himself a fortuitous figure in the most unlikely circumstances, place, and company has not felt the indefinable charm of these moments that have the improbability of a dream, moments when one savours to the full the strange, the exciting beauty of existence?

On the wall of Gambetta's room was the mark made by the bullet that had killed him. Bastien-Lepage showed it to Marie, 'and then,' she writes, 'the quietness of the room, the faded flowers, the sunshine through the window—in the end it made me cry.... But his back was turned, engrossed in his painting: so, not to lose the advantage of this sensitivity, I brusquely gave him my hand and went quickly out of the room, my face

covered with tears. I hope he noticed it. It is stupid . . . yes stupid to have to own that one is always thinking of the effect one makes.'

The early part of the year Marie worked at a painting of two street urchins, that she intended for the Salon. Bastien-Lepage's own work was like a flame that lit her path. Like most young artists, she had found the adoption of another painter's formula the easiest road to self-expression. She was aware of this and feared it. She dreaded that her painting should be merely a copy of his, but, as she ingenuously says, 'His painting resembles nature to such an extent that if one copies it faithfully one is doomed to resemble him.'

Bastien-Lepage's pictures were the means through which Marie approached Bastien-Lepage the man. Here, in this blunt-faced artist, was no physical attraction, no worldly graces: here was none of the visible splendour of the Duke: none of the boyish seduction of Antonelli: none of the sexual incitement of Lardarel: none of the complicated social appeal of Cassagnac: with these men Bastien had little in common. His appeal was of the spirit, his qualities perceptive intelligence, intuitions of genius, tenderness of heart, sincerity, an underlying greatness. Marie recognized the fineness of Bastien's texture: perhaps for the first time she knew what it was to feel reverence for another human being, and, humble and abashed, her spirit drew as close to his as it dared. 'A series of cheerful days,' writes Marie at the end of February, 'I sing, I talk, I laugh, and Bastien-Lepage comes like a refrain. Neither his person, nor his physique—hardly his talent. Nothing but the name....' 'You know,' she writes another day, 'that I am continually preoccupied with Bastien-Lepage; I have accustomed myself to pronounce this name and I avoid saying it in front of other people as if I were guilty. And when I do say it, it is with a tender familiarity that seems to me natural considering his talent but which might be wrongly interpreted. *Mon Dieu*, what a pity he can't come here as his brother does!'

'And what should I do if he did? But it would mean a friend! What! You do not understand friendships? Oh! myself, I would adore my celebrated friends, not only from vanity but from real liking, because of their qualities—their intelligence, their talent, their genius: they are a race apart; once past a certain banal mediocrity one finds oneself in a purer atmosphere where one can take hands and dance a roundelay in honour. . . . But what am I saying? That Bastien has a charming mind!'

Early this spring Marie suddenly wrote a letter to Alexandre Dumas. She wished to find some writer to whom to leave her diary, her idea probably being that an author would edit it better than anyone else. To confront this giant with her own insignificance required courage, but that was a quality in which she was never lacking, and considering the multiform difficulties of writing such a letter at all she does not begin so badly.

'Monsieur,

I am told that like all divinity which respects itself you are surrounded with a cloud that makes you indifferent to the inhabitants of earth.'

She then says she is sure he will do what she asks 'because I swear to you I want it intensely, and also because it will cost you nothing'.

The request is that he will advise her in some matter which to her is, she says, of great importance, and she also asks him, so as to enable her to tell him what this request is, to meet her at the opera ball on 20th March. She then urges him to believe she is a woman *comme il faut*, though adds that he will probably think the contrary. Dumas, now a man just on sixty, wrote back telling her that novel-reading had turned her head, and advising her to go to bed early. Marie wrote him a short note assuring him that she would, concluding with:

'Sleep well yourself Monsieur, and continue to be as bourgeois in small matters as you are an artist in great.'

So ended this slight contact between Dumas and Marie Bashkirtseff.

By the end of February Marie's picture for the Salon of two little street boys was all but finished. As an artist, urchins

pleased her. Tony came to see it: he was pleased and said so.  
 'All the same I am not satisfied, it has not made me cheerful.  
 Another day I should have leapt for joy all day . . . is it only  
 relatively very good, very good for me, or is it really good?'

The punishing criticisms she had had lately from Tony and Julien had unnerved her. But this time Julien too, coming round on his own initiative to see her work, praised her picture. On 15th of March she wrote: 'There it is finished!' and she went off to see Bastien-Lepage's show of pictures at his own studio. Before going to bed she sat down on the floor and wrote pages of detailed admiration of Bastien's work. Marie had originally taken up painting as a means to an end: now it filled her, illumined her life. Such spare time as she had she gave to sculpture, but later regretted it as a waste of her precious hours.

After her picture of the boys, and also a pastel of a head, had been sent up to the Salon there came the usual trepidation—would they be accepted or would they not? She felt fairly certain that they would; but what number would her pictures be given? Would she, could she, this time possibly get something on the line? One day at the end of March a fellow student, Ville-vieille, came in to see her. 'Had she,' Marie asked, 'heard anything about the Salon?'

'No.'

'What, you know nothing!'

'Nothing.'

'But you went by there.'

'I know nothing about it.'

'Probably because they've got to the letter C.'

'And,' wrote Marie afterwards, 'that was all!' 'I can only write with difficulty,' she added, 'my hands tremble, I feel quite disorganized, all to pieces. . . .'

There arrived another student from Julien's, Alice Brisbane.

'You are accepted!' announced Alice.

'Accepted how? Without a number?'

'So far nothing is known.'

Marie's anxiety became contagious. Her mother caught it: Aunt Sophie caught it: it spread to everyone in the house. This surround of excitement was torture to Marie who, while

FOUNTAINS OF YOUTH

surreptitiously sending off forty telegrams—apparently to Julien—tried outwardly to appear as if nothing of moment was afoot. At last a word came from Julien.

'O naïvité!' ran his note, 'O sublime ignorance! At last I am going to dispel you. Accepted with No. 3 at least, for I know someone who wanted a No. 2 for you. And now, conqueror, salutation and congratulations.'

'It is not happiness,' comments Marie, 'but it calms me. I don't believe that after these twenty-four hours of humiliating anxiety No. 1 itself would please me. Joy is said to be more intense after suffering. Not with me. Difficulties, humiliations, sufferings for me spoil everything.'

A few days later she received a note from Tony.

'Mademoiselle,

'I am writing to you actually at the table in the jury room to tell you that your pastel head has had a real success with the jury. I send you all my compliments. I've no need to tell you that your paintings have been very well received.'

'This year it has been a real success for you, and I am delighted.'

Kindest regards,

Tony Robert Fleury.'

Later he told her that though he could not '*promise*' she should be hung on the line it was within the bounds of possibility; further, he much hoped for her pictures 'a little reward', a 'mention', so it seems.

'Well,' writes Marie apropos of all this, 'You think I'm mad with delight? I feel very tranquil. . . . And as it is I to whom it has been written, it loses all its value. If I knew such a letter had been written to Breslau or to someone else I should be horribly upset. It isn't that I don't value what I've got. I have no faith in it . . . I'm afraid of rejoicing too soon.'

A fortnight later she even yet did not know her fate. Both Julien and Tony still encouraged her to hope for the 'mention'. But supposing she did finally receive it, this slow approach, step by step, robbed it of its charm. 'Life is logical and prepares us for events; that is what I lament.' What she would have liked would have been 'a clap of thunder: the medal falling from

heaven without warning and plunging me in an ocean of felicity'. Finally she heard that only two pastels had been received with the number one: these two pastels were respectively hers and Breslau's. Marie's was hung on the line, but her big picture was not, whereas a portrait by Breslau was. Therefore, far from any thunder of success Marie experienced merely a mixture of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and she writes, on the Saturday before varnishing day, 'Varnishing to-morrow. My picture is not on the line and my dress is ugly and...' No, she must accomplish something more startling than this. Her thoughts turned to the future: she began to map out plans: to arrange the year: she would do another picture of street urchins, then a month would have to be given to a visit to Russia, and then in October, she would go to Jerusalem to start on her big, her supreme picture, that of the Marys. To Jerusalem she would definitely go, and at Jerusalem she would remain just as long as was necessary to do the work she had planned. At the same time she would continue modelling a statue she was anxious to complete. She was settling down more to life, accepting more quietly the inevitable conditions it imposes; she saw clearly the path she must keep her feet on if she was to reach the heights. The path was proving infinitely longer than she had imagined. But, patience, patience, and again patience. Secretly she still assured herself that she would one day yet reach that paradise of fulfilment that, when younger, she had thought she would enter so easily; but even if wrapped now in the mist of distance, still through that mist gleamed the palms.

And too, she had come to love painting for its own sake, apart from what it might bring her. There were times when she would be so happily immersed in it that she would be shut off from the memory of dragging sadnesses and disappointments. 'I live in my art; going downstairs for dinner and talking to no one: I feel I am in a new phase. Everything outside what one is doing seems small and without interest. Taken this way life could be beautiful.' And steeped in contentment, seeing in her mind's eye as already finished the pictures she was going to paint, she could, above all, forget the thing which to remember was torment: her deafness. 'Everyone knows it.'

In speaking of me it's the first thing people must say: "You know she's a little deaf?" I don't know how I can write it.... Can one accustom oneself to such a grief? If it should happen to an old man, to an old woman, to someone who is wretched! But to a young creature, lively, vibrant, frantic with life!!!

But if life had brought her this misery it had almost at the same moment brought her a great happiness: the friendship of Bastien-Lepage. For if not already an intimate friendship it held promise of gradually becoming one. One day they would have a discussion in her own studio, another time they might meet by chance at the Salon. 'This ugly little man seemed more beautiful and attractive than an angel,' she wrote one day after they had been standing before his painting of Ophelia in the Salon while he explained to her the intention of the picture. 'One would like to spend one's life listening to him.' 'He speaks so simply,' she goes on, 'He replied to something, I don't know what, "I find so much poetry in nature," with such a real accent of sincerity that I remained enwrapped in its inexpressible charm.' At the Salon that day Marie had one 'beautiful moment' when, just before leaving, she found herself one of a group consisting of Bastien-Lepage himself, his brother Emile, Carolus Duran, Tony Robert Fleury, the sculptor Saint-Marceaux, and a few more equally well known men. It was a moment when the palms of her celestial Mecca gleamed clearly.

She asked herself about this time whether she would like to marry Bastien-Lepage? No, all things considered she decided, even if she had the chance, she would not. Marriage, now that she was wedded to her painting, was not in itself so much a desideratum. But apart from any thoughts of marriage, Bastien-Lepage's mind with its sensitive perceptions was working a gradual transmutation on hers, making it burgeon in a way it had not before. She began to be aware, as it was inevitable that she should, what an enlarged world her thoughts now moved in compared with that of the family friends who came and went in the house. 'As nearly every evening,' she writes one Sunday in April, 'there were people to dinner. I listened, and thought to myself, here are people who do nothing, and spend their life talking twaddle or gossip. Are they

happier than I am? . . . Their worries are different to mine and they suffer from them as much. And they don't get as much enjoyment as I do out of everything. A heap of things escape them: mere nothings, subtleties, reflections that for me are a field for observation and a source of pleasure unknown to the ordinary individual. . . . And if, since I sometimes hear less well, I am less than everyone else, perhaps there are compensations.'

This friendship with Bastien was certainly one of the greatest pieces of good fortune that had ever come her way, but at the same time it had, almost inevitably, a baleful effect on the old friendship between her and Julien. Julien, as an oracle, suffered a displacement. Like everybody else Marie had the vices of her virtues. Her stark integrity that made her such an admirable diarist made her, at times, a trying friend. Now that she had Bastien to talk to about painting, Julien inevitably took on a less important position in her life, and there is every indication that she was not tactful enough, perhaps did not even try, to hide the fact from him. We see the place she had now relegated him to by a chance entry in her diary on a day when she had asked him to come in and look at one of her paintings. 'You understand, I don't want his advice but only the impression of the public—well, Julien represents the right thinking majority.' One notices that it was just about when she first got to know Bastien, the year before, and was a-twitter with the excitement of it, that Julien began, to her bewilderment, to say harsh things about her work. 'The more I think of it,' she writes to him in a letter about this time, 'the more it seems to me you have some inexplicable interest in annihilating me; you positively revel in the most subtle discouragements.' All the same she had ended the letter 'we are still friends, and the proof is that on Saturday you dine in the *rue Ampère*.'

Besides this insertion of Bastien between them there was Marie's annoyance at Julien marrying Amélie. That Julien on his side thought Marie sometimes lacking in agreeableness is very evident from a remark he made one day in the spring of this year, 1883, when he had good-naturedly expressly come in to see one of her paintings. 'This evening,' writes Marie, 'Julien was perfect—serious, tactful, pleasant. He neither

joked nor teased me. I remarked on it, and he told me that according to how I behave to him so does he to me.' In fact, though the friendship between them had lost its original shape it still existed.

As for her new friendship with Bastien, it moved slowly. She would try sometimes to accelerate its pace by very much praising the sculptor Saint-Marceaux. Bastien would appear satisfactorily jealous, and then, just when the personal atmosphere seemed to be coming more fluid it would stiffen again, and Marie would have a tremor of fear as to whether Bastien really even liked her. One evening in May when he came to the Bashkirtseffs' he told Marie that an artist should conserve his energy for his art alone, but, says Marie, 'with me there is such an exuberance of *everything* that if I didn't expend it I shouldn't be able to contain myself.' After dinner Marie and Bastien-Lepage inevitably went up to her studio. She did not want him to see the beginning she had made of her big picture so had had the canvas turned to the wall, but he, determined to see it, crept in between canvas and wall, and almost there was a scuffle between them. Later, Marie began lauding Saint-Marceaux, and so effectively that Bastien said he felt jealous, and that little by little he should try and supplant this man in her mind. 'He repeated it several times,' writes Marie with satisfaction, 'and the other day the same—well, even if it is a joke, it delights me.' Feeling she was working along the right line, she continued to laud Saint-Marceaux's work. 'Well,' she would say of Saint-Marceaux's sculpture, 'you like it? Surely you must like it?'

'Yes, I do very much.'

'Do you like it as much as I do?'

'Oh, no. I'm not a woman: I like it, but . . .'

'But it isn't as a woman that I like it.'

'But I think it is, that's a little mixed up in your admiration.'

'No—I swear it isn't.'

'I think so—unconsciously.'

'Oh! you can think that! . . .'

'Yes, and I'm jealous of it, myself I'm not a fine dark fellow. . . .'

'He is like Shakespeare.'

'You see the likeness...?'

All this sounds satisfactory enough, but beneath the banter Marie was not quite at ease. There was always an indefinable something between them that made her nervous. 'The real Bastien is going to dislike me! Why? I don't know: it frightens me.' Here at last was one of her ardently longed for Famous talking intimately to her in her own studio—intimately and yet not intimately! There was the rub! 'We are hostile to each other, one feels little inexplicable things... and I am stopped from saying before him things that would make him... perhaps like me a little.'

We, as we watch this girl, her face anxious beneath her pale, piled-up hair, talking to Bastien over her canvasses, can perhaps, knowing more of him than she did, see further into his mind. As he got to know Marie in the setting of her family in the *rue Ampère* he must have noticed her arbitrary attitude to her family, her ruthlessness if they the least annoyed her (Tony one day scolded her for the rude manner in which she turned her aunt out of the room so as to discuss her work with him alone) and one can well imagine how these things must have rasped the sensibilities of Bastien whose tender affection for his own family was remarkable. Bastien had been made much of in England. He had painted a portrait of the Prince of Wales,<sup>1</sup> he had enjoyed the friendship of William Gladstone. But far more than the tactfully chosen observations of the Prince, far more than the solemnities of William Gladstone, had he preferred the daily intimacy with his old peasant grandfather in their cottage home.

Regarding Marie and her high-handedness, one may wonder how it was that year in year out she managed to keep the absolute devotion of her family. The vehemence of her character must have been offset by very attaching qualities to keep her family at such a level of personal devotion. And there is no doubt she did possess most attractive qualities: for one thing she had that spontaneous gaiety that, for the less nimble-minded, seems to bespatter life with flowers; and too she had, except when swept along by egoism, a heart both warm and pitiful. As for *les mères*, Julien said that they would gladly

<sup>1</sup> Later, Edward VII.

have set Paris on fire to please her. Apart from going to these lengths they did, on one occasion give a most definite, an almost dramatic expression of their devotion. All four of them, Marie, Dina, and *les mères* had been to an exhibition of jewelry, and Marie, without any thought of ever possessing them, had extravagantly admired two large unset diamonds for which the price asked was enormous. The next day she found these two diamonds on her dressing-table. For once she knew the exquisite pleasure of finding a casually expressed wish swiftly, spectacularly gratified. This was how life ought to be: not full of the resistant stiffness of hostile circumstances but plastic, fluid, responsive! Well! she had the diamonds: the diamonds in place of how much that she had not!

## 23

This May there came news that Constantin was extremely ill. It was not a moment for delay. Madame Bashkirtseff hurried off to Russia.

Marie's feelings for her father we know, and though during the last few years they had perhaps become slightly modified they had not materially altered. The chief way that his illness affected her was that it put an end to a project she had had of having 'an interesting salon'. 'That,' she writes, 'is what I'm after . . . and each time this hope is beginning to be realized something intervenes: here is Mama gone, Papa dying....'

'My idea was to have a dinner every week, followed by a reception . . . on the Thursday for instance, and Saturday, another dinner for artists, the chief celebrities appearing at the Thursday *soirée*, having dined the Saturday before.' And now this procession of celebrities in and out of the drawing-room was held up by Constantin choosing to die. . . . But Marie's thoughts only rested a moment at Gavronzi before they flicked back again to her own immediate concerns. The Salon was just about to be shut for three days, and during those three days it would be settled whether she was going to get a mention for her picture or not. She lived only for the re-opening Thursday.

AT JULIEN'S

This May Paris swooned in heat. 'It is so hot that one only comes alive in the evening. I go up to my own room, very pleased at having the whole floor quiet. . . .

'One hears the whistle from the railway, and the church bell in the *rue Brémontier*. . . .

'These lovely evenings one ought to make up parties to go into the country, on the water, anywhere, with plenty of people: what people . . . ?

'I think of all this Paris of the Champs Elysées and the Bois which is alive . . . while I . . . am I right, am I wrong in throwing away my youth as food for ambitions which. . . . In fact am I going to reap the interest on the capital invested?

'In the night the whistle is very melodious. Numbers of people coming back from the country, tired people, pensive people, cheerful drunkards. . . .

'Again the whistle. . . .

'When I am celebrated . . . and perhaps that will be in a year's time . . . I am very patient, as if I were certain. . . .

'Again the whistle . . . and they say that when one hears it like that it is because it is stormy. . . .

'Very difficult to read Balzac in this state of mind; but I shall not read anything else, so as to avoid getting excited.

'Again the bell, and the whistle.'

The second day of the closed Salon found Marie in a state of tension, expecting any moment, every moment, to know about this *Mention*: in itself not much, yet not to get it would be lacerating. 'I worked up till half-past seven. But at every sound, at every bell, at every bark from Coco my heart goes into my boots. . . . It is nine o'clock in the evening, and no news. . . . If I've got nothing it will be very annoying—they've talked so much about it beforehand in the studio, and Julien, Lefebvre, Tony, all of them, it's impossible I should not get it. Really it's not very nice of them, they might have sent me a wire. . . .

'If . . . if I had got something, I should have heard by now. Therefore?

'I have got a slight headache.

'All the same it's not that it's so very important, but it's been given out . . . and then, uncertainty is odious over anything.

'And my heart that goes on beating, beating.... What a wretched thing life is! . . . and what for? To end in death! . . .

*'To end, to end, not to exist any more,* that is the most horrible thing of all! To have enough genius to live for ever. . . . I feverishly write down these stupidities because I'm waiting for the announcement of a miserable *Mention*.

'They've just brought me a letter, my heart stopped. It is from Doucet, about a bodice!

'I shall take a little more syrup of opium so as to keep calm. . . .

'Impossible to settle down to anything; . . . .

'A quarter past nine. . . .

'It affects me in my legs, like a flame enveloping my whole body and making my cheeks burn. . . .

'It's only twenty-five minutes past nine.

'Julien ought to have come. . . . He would have come, he knew about six o'clock, he would have come to dinner. Is there nothing then? . . . .

'I've been watching the carriages, they go by . . . Oh! now it's too late.'

This was written Tuesday, 22nd May. On the Thursday the first entry in her diary is 'I have got it'.

Steeped in satisfaction she and some of her family started off at half-past nine in the morning to the Salon. As they shut their front door Bojidar and his father appeared, come to congratulate Marie, and with the young man added to their party the Bashkirtseffs went on to the Salon. Within Marie's mind was the vision of her oil painting hung now on the line, and gleaming against the frame a piece of cardboard with the words, *Mention honorable*: it was a pleasant thing for her mind's eye to dwell on. They arrived. Marie went to the room where was her painting. It had been hung still higher than when she last saw it, and there was no *Mention* attached to it. Then had the *Mention* been given, not as she had imagined, to her oil painting but to her other exhibit, that which she refers to as her 'odious pastel'? She ran to where it hung. Yes, there was the *Mention* stuck on to it! Disappointment struck her like a blow. With 'one bound' she was at Julien's, where for half an hour she could barely speak. Julien was all kindness. His astonishment and his sympathy were equal to the occasion;



LE MEETING  
By MARIE BASHKIRTSEFF  
In the Musée du Luxembourg



also they were genuine. He sent off 'hurried and persuasive' telegrams to Tony, to Cot, to Lefèvre. But it was too late: nothing could be done. That the *Mention* should have been given to her despised pastel was bad enough, but what really wounded her was her picture being hung, not only not on the line as she had expected, but higher than before. Here it was again: the impossibility in this world of receiving any happiness whole and entire. Always it contained some vulnerable place into which annoyance and disappointment could creep. 'To sky her picture! . . . alone in my room it makes me sob to write of it.'

Few things more mark Marie as of her period than her belief that her constant weepings will impress her readers; for tears, if copious enough, had then a value they do not now possess. If not a success in life there was still the chance that by grief a woman could at least become 'interesting'. But grief has gone out of fashion. Tears have lost their news value: they do not now interest but bore. They used to be an integral part of that resignation to circumstances that was considered as so becoming to a woman, and believed to be regarded with such favour in the courts of Heaven. All that has changed. Exertion has become the virtue, resignation almost a sin. Both modern psychology and invention have displaced a good many moral values. Except in unusually desperate cases, described by Matthew Arnold as those when there is everything to be endured and nothing to be done, there is more to combat suffering than there used to be; far greater variety of interests and occupations, easier travel, more efficient cures, more spontaneous friendships: all these are weapons against unhappiness, and the one who makes the most use of them is the one most lauded. But if Marie is not of our era as regards tears she had one extremely modern touch, she both realized the necessity and possessed the art of making her misfortunes amusing to her friends. Even as her eye travelled up the wall to her skied picture and she received the full shock of disappointment she had pulled her courage together, and made it, she writes, 'for those around me an amusing scene; . . . one should never bore people, one must always be a distraction, a novelty. . . .'

Finally, Dina and Bojidar went to see the Salon authorities about the matter; but nothing could be done; so Bojidar cut off the *Mention* card and brought it home to Marie who at once tied it to the tail of her dog.

On the 11th of June a telegram was delivered in the *rue Ampère* from Russia. Constantin had died.

Marie went up to her room. Her eyes were dry, but her mind was in commotion. Constantin was no longer alive . . . Constantin was dead. . . . It was ten o'clock, and the summer morning lay over Paris. Constantin was dead . . . Rosalie came in to ask her about the details of a dress she was altering: 'It's not worth while doing it,' said Marie, 'Monsieur is dead,' and at the words her tears suddenly poured down. She picked up her diary and began to write, 'Did I behave badly to him? I don't think so . . . but at such a moment one always thinks oneself guilty of something . . . I ought to have gone [to Gavronzi] with Mama. . . .

'He was only fifty . . . and really had done no harm to anyone. Much loved at Gavronzi, perfectly honourable, upright, against any jobbery, and very much *bon garçon*.'

Many men would be glad of as good an epitaph.

Ten days later Marie went to the Salon for the giving of the awards. Looking round her at the group of her fellow artists the pathos of some of them smote her: middle-aged men in thread-bare clothes, pale with emotion; in especial, a sculptor who having gone up to the table to receive his medal and come back to his seat opened the little box which contained it 'with', writes Marie, 'a beautiful happy smile, quite involuntary, like the smile of a child.'

When Marie's own turn came she too went up to the table and received her official *Mention honorable*. But her treatment over her picture still rankled, and she remarked, loudly enough —probably to Dina or Aunt Sophie who were with her—that the jury were 'idiots'. This observation was overheard.

AT JULIEN'S

'Well,' she wrote that evening, 'here is the day of awards over! I never imagined it like this!

'Oh! next year to gain a medal!... And, at last, for everything to take place as in a dream!... To be applauded, to triumph!...'

'And when you have got a second medal, you will want the big one? Doubtless.

'And then the cross?—Why not?—And afterwards?—...'

'Yes we will see about afterwards, there is no hurry....'

Small thing that the *Mention* was, it did at least seem an earnest of better to come, her feet were on the path. To be alive, in fact, was worth while; and she decided she would go so far as to concede a point to her doctors and allow the blistering with its inevitable burning mark, on her chest. 'I've decided at last, there will be a yellow mark for three or four months; but at least I shan't die of consumption.'

A few days later, Saint-Marceaux, the sculptor, came to the *rue Ampère*. Nervous with excitement Marie 'put on, took off and put on again two dresses, kept him waiting a long time and received him at last, flushed and badly turned out'. This unfortunate lack of poise persisted throughout his visit, and was not helped by his admiring none of her paintings except a portrait she had done of Dina, which painting not being her later work, she did not particularly wish admired. Saint-Marceaux gave her his views on art and her own work without any mincing: he was disruptive and terse, and let fall a hard glare on all cherished beliefs. He made short work of her predilection for painting street urchins, saying that they were easy enough, the difficulty was to do 'things that are delicate and pretty *and that have character*'. He left Marie a good deal flattened out, assuring herself, however, that he had been 'charming' but that 'what has left an unpleasant impression is that I was neither pretty, lively, nor amusing'.

A few weeks later Bastien came to dinner. Again Marie was throttled by nervousness. Here were the famous at last coming to the house, and her very admiration for them made her inadequate. As Bastien talked on in his altogether delightful, intelligent way she heard herself laughing far too often; helplessly she took note of her own clumsinesses, her stupid

silences. The truth is Bastien surprised her this evening by the depth and scope of his intelligence; 'he understands everything, he is cultured too . . . ten minutes after he came I had mentally capitulated and accepted his influence.

'I said nothing that I ought to have. He behaves like God, and thinks he is. . . . He is small and, for ordinary people, ugly: but for me . . . his head is charming. What does he think of me? I was *gauche*, laughing too often. . . .'

The rest of this year was a see-saw of hopes and despairs over her painting. There was the devastating day when, she writes, 'I was going to send my picture in to the triennial on the 20th of August, the final date, and it is not the 20th, it is to-day, the 16th, that is the final day.' Locking herself into the lavatory she wept there undisturbed. 'Once I wept in Mama's arms, and this shared suffering has been for months such a cruel humiliation that I shall not cry again from grief in front of anyone . . . to expose one's weakness, one's wretchedness, one's misery, one's humiliation, never!'

At times now her eyes were so bad that she would deliberately neither read nor paint for a fortnight in the hope that this might improve them. She had read in Stendhal that troubles are less insupportable if one idealizes them. 'It is excessively true. How idealize mine? It is impossible. They are so bitter, so pointless, so dreadful that I can't speak of them even here without wounding myself horribly.' So worried was she over her eyes that the thought that she might soon die would at times come into her mind almost as a relief.

But all her days this autumn were not tormented. There was the day in November when she saw a reproduction of one of her pictures on the front page of *Illustration Universelle*, the most important illustrated Russian paper: there was the day when another of her pictures was sold in a lottery for 130 francs. Her mother and Dina 'tried', writes Marie, 'to make me believe it was 230, but I saw quite well that the 2 had been a 1 in the catalogue. Dina told the princess and others 430 francs. O truth! At any rate the 130 was true.'

In the autumn Marie did a painting of Bojidar among the nasturtiums on the balcony. While she worked away he stood

there slowly twisting a nasturtium flower in his fingers, his young eyes on the passing *fiares* below, while through the mild autumn air the sounds of Paris rose in a muted humming. These moments while Marie painted and Bojidar posed were peaceful moments. Peaceful and pleasant too were these autumn evenings when Marie and a girl friend whom she calls 'Claire', lay outstretched side by side on the drawing-room floor and discussed painting. But agreeable companions as were Bojidar and Claire, Marie longed for an intimate whose intelligence was on the level of her own, and such an intimate she had not got. Bastien-Lepage she did not see often, and she looked back now with longing on the old easy friendship that had once existed between herself and Julien. How delightful it had been always having him to run round to, how much those long, breathlessly interesting talks on painting in general and her own painting in particular, had meant to her: and now she found him 'more and more shut away.... He is irritating too when he starts these interminable teasings with their side-thrusts, especially over questions to do with art; he does not understand that I see clearly and want to get somewhere; he thinks me infatuated with myself... to sum up, he is still my confidant at intervals'.

But only at intervals. Really, her diary seemed on the whole the most intimate, the most satisfactory life-long friend she had: her diary and her yet unborn readers. The thought of those unborn readers she found curiously comforting, and it is very evident she clung to the idea that, if by no other means, she might through their interest in her attain posthumous fame. 'It would be curious,' she writes, 'if the recital of my failures and obscurity were going to give me what I always pursue and always shall pursue. But I shall not know it....'

Just at the end of the year she was one day quite overthrown at hearing that the old malicious scandals of Nice had revived in Paris, but this time in a more venomous form: 'And I have done nothing,' she protests, 'either to myself or others.... There are days when one emits light, others on which one is like an extinguished lantern: I am extinguished.'

But the next day she heard something repeated which was

To return to letters from unknown women. The last two years I have received about fifty or sixty. How can one, as you say, choose among these women one's mind's confidant? . . . Why neglect the charming friends whom one knows for a friend, possibly charming, but unknown, that is to say who may be disagreeable, perhaps to one's eyes, perhaps to one's mind? All this is not very polite, is it? But if I threw myself at your feet, could you look on me as safe in my moral affections?

Forgive, Madame, these reasonings of a man more practical than poetical, and believe me yours gratefully and truly

Guy de Maupassant.'

But Marie did not consider she had suggested being Maupassant's confidante. Discouraging though his letter was she would at least make this point clear.

'Your letter, Monsieur,' she wrote back, 'did not surprise me, and I was not altogether expecting what you seemed to think.'

'But, first of all, I did not ask to be your confidante, that would be a little too silly, and if you have the time to re-read my letter you will see . . .' and so on.

'As for the charm that can be added by mystery, it's a matter of taste . . . if you don't find it amusing it is because not one of your sixty correspondents has known how to interest you, that is all, and if I have not known either how to strike the right note I am too reasonable to bear you any grudge.'

'Only sixty? I should have imagined you more importuned. . . . Did you reply to them all? . . .'

'Are we, to my very lively regret, to stop at this point? Unless one day I have a mind to prove to you that I don't deserve to be No. 61. . . .'

'However, if all that is needed to draw to me the benevolence of your venerable soul . . . is some vague description—one might perhaps say, for instance: fair hair, etc., medium figure. Born between the year 1812 and the year 1863.'

Instead of signing it she put a postscript: 'Forgive the blots, scratchings out, etc. But I have already copied it out three times.'

Very well then, if, in spite of polite hints of discouragement, she still wished to go on, he, Maupassant, could now throw politeness aside and write at his ease.

'Yes, Madame, a second letter! I myself am surprised. Possibly I feel a vague desire to be impertinent. That is allowable as I don't know you at all; but, no, I write to you because I am horribly bored. . . .

'You know me more or less. You know what you are doing and whom you are addressing. . . . But I? . . .

'You may in fact be a young and charming woman whose hands, one day, I shall be happy to kiss. But also you may be an old concierge nourished on the novels of Eugène Sue. You might too be a demoiselle of the literary set, and withered and dry as a broomstick.

'Are you, in fact, thin? Not too thin I hope? It would make me wretched to have a thin correspondent. I am suspicious of everything to do with an unknown woman. . . . Are you a woman of the world? A sentimental? Or simply a romantic? Or again, simply a woman who is bored?—and who is trying to amuse herself. I, I can assure you, am not at all the man you are looking for.

'I have not a ha'porth of poetry in me. I am indifferent to everything, and I spend two thirds of my time boring myself profoundly. The third I occupy partly by writing lines that I sell at the highest price possible, wretched to be forced to do this abominable task that has made me worthy of the honour of being distinguished—mentally—by you.

'There are confidences! What do you think of them, Madame?

'You must think me very free and easy. Forgive me. I feel, in writing to you, that I am walking in subterranean darkness with the fear of holes in front of me. And I beat about at random with a cane to sound the ground.

'What is your scent? . . . Are you greedy? . . . What is your physical ear like? . . . The colour of your eyes? . . . A musician?

'I don't ask if you are married. If you are you will say you are not. If you are not, you will say you are. Madame, I kiss your hands.

Guy de Maupassant.'

Marie's longwinded reply was a poor thing compared to Maupassant's deliciously insolent spontaneity. She was obviously delighted at his writing a second time: was she this time really going to acquire a famous writer as a friend? Bastien alone could not make a salon; she needed others. In her reply, in her desire to enmesh Maupassant, she became verbose, grew sententious over Flaubert, George Sand, Balzac, and Montesquieu. Anxious to be original she even dragged in the Almighty and Moses. Then she became gayer, telling him, 'This is how I see you—you have a fairly big stomach, a too short waistcoat made of nondescript stuff, and the lowest button undone. Well, you interest me all the same. Only what I can't understand is how you can be bored. Myself, I am sometimes sad, discouraged, or angry, but bored . . . never!' With this letter she enclosed a little sketch of a fat man sunk in an arm-chair by a table beneath a palm tree by the sea, with a *bock* and a cigar.

But Marie's mention of so many writers had raised Maupassant's suspicions in a way she had not foreseen.

'Oh, now I know what you are . . .' he wrote back, 'you are a professor of the sixth class at the *Lycée Louis-le-Grand*. . . Ah, you sly old creature, you old usher, you old gnawer of Latin, you wanted to be taken for a pretty woman? And you are going to send to me one of your essays, a manuscript on art and nature to send to some review and mention in an article!

'How fortunate that I did not tell you that I was passing through Paris! One morning I should have had arriving at my house a shabby old man who would have put his hat on the ground and drawn out of his pocket a roll of paper tied up with string. And he would have said: "Monsieur, I am the lady" . . .

'Well, *Monsieur le professeur*, all the same I am going to reply to some of your questions. I'll begin by thanking you for the kind details you have given me on your person and tastes. I thank you equally for the portrait you have done of me. It is like me, *ma foi!* All the same I must point out some mistakes.

'1. Less stomach.

AT JULIEN'S

'2. I don't smoke.

'3. I drink neither beer, wine, nor alcohol. Nothing but water. . . .

'Now that I have given you all my confidences, Mr. Usher, tell me about yourself, about your wife, as you are married, about your children. . . .

G. de M.'

'Yes, Monsieur,' writes Marie in her return letter, 'I have, as you say, the honour to be an usher, and I am going to prove it by eight pages of admonition.' She proceeds to tell him that in his writing he shows himself to be a monomaniac on the subject of love, and that the sad undertone of his novel *Une Vie* is merely a reflection of Flaubert. She signs her letter 'Savantin (Joseph).'

This letter did for her: girl or usher, Maupassant wanted no more of her.

'My dear Joseph,

'The moral, is it not, of your letter, is this? As neither of us knows the other at all don't let us be the least embarrassed with each other, and let us speak frankly like two cronies. . . .

'You think something amuses me? And that I make fun of the public? My poor Joseph, there is not under the sun a man more bored than I am. Nothing seems to me worth the trouble of making an effort, or worth the fatigue of a movement. I am bored without intermission, without peace and without hope, because I want nothing and I look forward to nothing. As for weeping over things I can't change, I'm not as spoilt as all that. Also, as we are being frank with each other, I warn you this is my last letter because I'm beginning to feel I've had enough. Why should I go on writing to you? It does not amuse me, it can bring me nothing agreeable in the future. Therefore?

'I don't want to know you. I'm sure you are ugly, and then it strikes me that by these means I've sent you enough autographs. Do you know they are worth 10 to 20 sous each? . . .

'I am going to Etretat for a change, seizing an opportunity

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when I can go there alone. I have a passion for being alone. In this way I can at least be bored without having to speak.

'You ask what my age is exactly. Having been born on the 5th of August, 1850, I'm not yet thirty-four. Are you satisfied? Are you now going to ask me for my photograph? I warn you I shan't send it.

'Yes, I like pretty women, but there are days when I feel sick to death of them.

'Now you will be able to give serious information about me to those who want it. . . .

'Adieu, my old Joseph! . . . Give me your hand that I may cordially press it, sending you a final souvenir,

Guy de Maupassant.'

So this was what came of writing anonymous letters! Off-hand rudeness, contempt, dismissal! Marie was sore from humiliation. Here was this ceaseless frustration that, whatever she did, blocked her path. However, if dismissed, she would at least try to make a dignified exit. Maupassant's letter had been strangely scented with ambergris. Here was something she could fasten on!

'Your letter was too perfumed. It alone would have suffocated me, and there was no need to put so much scent. So that's what you find to reply to a woman who, at the most, has been culpable of imprudence? Very pretty!

'No doubt Joseph is entirely in the wrong, and that's just why he is so annoyed. But his head was full of all the . . . frivolities of your books, like a refrain that one can't get rid of. All the same I blame him severely, for one ought to be certain of the courtesy of one's adversary before taking the risk of jokes like his. . . .

'Why did I write to you? One wakes up one fine morning and discovers one is a rare being surrounded by imbeciles. . . . Supposing I wrote to a celebrated man, a man worthy of understanding me? It would be charming, romantic, and, who knows? After a certain number of letters perhaps one would have acquired a friend in unusual circumstances: then one asks, who shall it be? And you are chosen! . . .

'At the point we have reached, as you say, I can go so far as to

tell you that your infamous letter made me spend a wretched day. I am as hurt as if it had been a real injury, which is absurd.

'Adieu with pleasure.

'If you still have them, return me my autographs. As for yours, I've already sold them in America at a fabulous price.'

This letter, which was decidedly her best, had a curious effect on Maupassant. Exasperated, he had shot an arrow into the dark where lurked this unknown correspondent, and out of the dark had come the cry of some young thing wounded, and this sound had disconcerted Maupassant, made him sorry.

'Madame,' he wrote back, 'I have really hurt you then? Don't deny it. I am delighted. And I very humbly beg your pardon.'

'I asked myself: who is it? First she wrote me a sentimental letter, the letter of a dreamer.... That is a common enough pose with girls. Is it a girl? Then, Madame, I answered in a sceptical tone. You answered quicker than I, and your last letter but one had some odd things in it. I had not the faintest idea what sort of character you could be.'

'You are annoyed. I ask your forgiveness, especially as one remark in your letter hurt me a great deal. You say that my 'infamous' reply (it's not the word infamous that affected me) made you "spend a wretched day!" ...

'Now believe me, Madame, I am neither as brutal nor as sceptical nor as badly behaved as I appeared to you to be. But I have, in spite of myself, a great mistrust of all mystery, of unknown men and unknown women. How can you expect me to say a single sincere thing to a person... who writes to me anonymously, who may be an enemy (I have got them) or merely someone playing the fool? With people who are masked I put on a mask. That is only fair. However, by a trick I've just seen a tiny little bit of your real character.'

'Again, forgive me.

'I kiss the unknown hand that writes to me.'

'Your letters, Madame, are at your disposal but I shall only give them back into your hands. Ah, for that I would go to Paris.'

Guy de Maupassant.'

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It was a letter that did credit to Maupassant's heart, a letter calculated to act as balm to any carelessly inflicted wound. But Marie was not going to let him exonerate himself for his rudeness as easily as all that. A few parting words were necessary.

'In writing to you again I shall ruin myself in your eyes for ever. But it is all the same to me and, besides, it is to revenge myself. Oh, only by telling you the effect you produced by your trick of finding out my character! I was positively frightened to send to the post office, imagining the most fantastic things. And before opening the envelope I had prepared myself for anything so as not to get a shock. I did get it all the same, but agreeably.'

*Devant les doux accents d'un noble repentir  
Ne faut-il donc, seigneur, cesser de vous sentir?*

'... Adieu! I forgive you, if it means anything to you, because I am ill and, which never happens to me as a rule, it has softened me to myself, to the whole world, to you who found the means of being so profoundly disagreeable to me....

'How can I prove to you that I'm not someone playing the fool, or one of your enemies? And of what use would it be? Impossible, too, to swear to you that we are made to understand one another. You are not worthy of me. I regret it. Nothing would be more agreeable to me than to recognize in you every superiority, in you or in anyone else....

'All the same a very sensitive little trifle in your letter made me dream. You have been distressed at hurting me. That is foolish and charming. Chiefly charming!... Yes, there you had a flavour of romanticism à la Stendhal... but take it calmly, you won't die of it this time.'

'Good night.'

Freed from her wish to know Maupassant, Marie had written him a letter as full of aplomb as his own. And as he read it, his interest was stung. Yes, quite definitely now he would like to know the writer of these letters!

'Clearly, Madame,' he wrote back, 'you are not satisfied,

and to prove your irritation, you declare that I am far your inferior.

'Oh, Madame, if you knew me you would know that as regards mental or artistic worth I lay claim to neither. At heart I jeer at one as much as the other. To me everything in life is nearly the same—men, women, events. There is my real profession of faith; and I will add what you will not believe, that I think no more of myself than of other people. Everything ends by being boring, ridiculous, and wretched.'

'You say that in writing to me again you will ruin yourself in my opinion for ever. Why so? You had the rare good sense to confess that you were wounded by my letter, to admit it in an exasperated, simple, frank, and charming manner that touched and moved me....'

'Oh, I know very well that now I shall inspire you with strong suspicion. So much the worse. Then you don't want us to meet? One learns more about anyone in hearing them talk for five minutes than by writing to them for ten years.'

'How is it that you don't know any of the people I know? For when I'm in Paris I go out every evening. Should you tell me to go on a certain day to a certain house I would be there. If you thought my appearance too disagreeable you would not make yourself known to me. But don't have any illusions as to my person. I am neither beautiful, elegant, nor remarkable....'

'Do you go into the Orleanist world, or the Buonaparte, or the Republican? I know all three. Would you like me to station myself in a museum, a church, or a street?'

'In that case I should add conditions to make sure of not setting out to wait for a woman who was not coming. What would you say to an evening at the theatre without, if you should so wish, your making yourself known? I would tell you the number of my box where I would go with friends. You would not tell me the number of yours. And the next day you could write to me, "*Adieu, Monsieur.*" Am I not more magnanimous than the French guards at Fontenoy?'

'Madame, I kiss your hands.'

Maupassant.'

'No, I don't want to see you,' Marie wrote back, now realizing that Maupassant's idea of seeing her was, in his own mind, to be merely a preliminary, if she proved attractive, to an easy love affair. She had wanted a correspondence in the clouds, a relationship of the spirit, but the idea had proved altogether too fragile, too disembodied for this terrestrial globe. In another world her idea might have been feasible but in this, apparently, it was not. If Maupassant had passed the test, if he had proved himself to be the man she had imagined from his books, then he should have been made the legatee of her diary. But no, he was quite other, he was no use to her.

'No, I don't want to see you.'

'And you—you do not wish for a touch of fantasy in the midst of your Parisian coarseness? No impalpable friendship? I don't refuse to see you, and am even going to arrange it without your knowing. If you knew you were being looked at specially it might make you look stupid. That must be avoided. I am indifferent to your terrestrial envelope....'

'Boredom, ridiculousness, wretchedness . . . Ah! Monsieur, it's perfectly true, and the same with me. But with me it's because I want tremendous things that I have not got . . . yet.'

No more letters passed between these two. The truth is, another writer had appeared on Marie's horizon; that is to say he had in a sense appeared there.

Early this year of 1884 one of the foremost French writers, Edmond de Goncourt, published a curious little novel entitled *Chérie*. Marie was by now fairly well known in Paris, and it is clear that Goncourt had taken the idea of his heroine from her: in the novel there are even certain small incidents that are to be found in her diary, and it would have been easy enough for these incidents to have drifted to Goncourt through the literary and artistic *côteries* of Paris.

Goncourt's novel opens with a champagne dinner party given by his heroine, Chérie, aged nine, the guests being composed entirely of exquisitely dressed little girls. None but a Frenchman's pen could so pirouette in describing this absurd dinner, these infants touched with debauch. We are shown a cherub

of five asleep with its head on the table, one hand aloft still holding its fork on which is speared a piece of chicken, its baby mouth white with bread sauce. This scandalous guest is carried off in the arms of a footman, while another, in whom the champagne is equally running riot, having removed most of its clothes beneath the level of the table, suddenly leaps up on its chair clad only in a minute chemise and makes a speech.

After this baby extravaganza Goncourt goes back to *Chérie's* birth and, petal by petal, reveals her flowering from infant to child, from childhood to girlhood. Here is every shade of change in a growing girl's development, both physiological and psychological, the inner knowledge of a doctor utilized by the mind of a superb artist, and so enchanting is the writing, so delicate the tones, so subtle the mutations, that often one seems more to be listening to some aria on a violin than reading printed words.

Finally, after this exquisite *tour de force*, the book suddenly changes its tone and ends as ridiculously as it began. *Chérie* goes mad from sexual repression, gnaws mustard sandwiches or, nibbling at a piece of stale cheese, lies prone on the floor propelling herself along like any python. The ultimate fate of virgins is impressed on the reader by the last page on which is printed a replica of the card sent round by the wretched girl's grandfather to his friends announcing her death. It is possible that Goncourt wrote this novel as propaganda, but the skit on Marie being unmistakable there was a macabre cruelty in its climax.

The book created a stir, was read by all Paris, and, needless to say, by Marie. Exactly what she felt at this travesty of herself we do not know, but we do know that her mind had fastened on a sentence in the preface in which Goncourt announced that he was 'deeply interested in genuine memoranda'. She decided she would go further than she had intended to with Maupassant, and offer the author of *Chérie* her diary while she was still alive. Yes, she would write to Goncourt!

'Monsieur,

'Like everyone else I have read *Chérie* and, between ourselves, it is full of platitudes.'

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Such she considered a suitable opening to one of the most brilliant writers of the day.

'She who has the audacity to write to you,' continues Marie, 'is a young girl brought up in luxurious surroundings, elegant, sometimes eccentric. This young girl who is twenty-three . . . is literary, artistic, pretentious. She possesses copy-books in which she has noted down her impressions since she was twelve. In it nothing is omitted. Besides, the young girl in question is endowed with a pride that has the effect of making her in her writing expose herself in her entirety.'

'To reveal this sort of thing to anyone is to strip oneself naked. But she has the love of all real art pushed to an extreme point. . . . It seems to her it would be interesting to make this diary known to you. You say somewhere that you are deeply interested in genuine memoranda. Well! she who so far is nothing, but already has the pretension to understand the feelings of great men, thinks like you, and, at the risk of appearing a lunatic and a humbug, proposes giving you her diary.' Marie then emphasizes how she relies on Goncourt's discretion, and to finish (no doubt with the recollection of Maupassant's jeer on the subject) assures him:

'If you think I want an autograph you need not sign what you honour me by writing.'

J. R. I. (*poste restante*).'

But Goncourt did not honour her with any writing. He had no wish to see her soul, naked or clothed; felt no interest in her diary. But keep her letter he did: probably as being one of the most impertinent communications he had ever received.

Well, there it was, Dumas and Goncourt would have none of her. Maupassant—in the sense in which she needed him—was useless. But she would have one more venture, there still remained Zola! Yes, she would make one final effort. But her past experiences had been unpleasantly humiliating; and this time she decided to safeguard herself to the extent of saying that she did not expect Zola to answer. The tactless egoism of her opening sentences could not be surpassed.

AT JULIEN'S

'Monsieur,

'I have read all you have written without saying a word. If you have merely even a slight consciousness of your worth you will understand my enthusiasm. And so that this enthusiasm should not seem to you merely naïve I must tell you that I am very spoilt, full of pretensions, having read nearly everything, having, even though a woman, studied the classics.'

So her letter goes on. She concludes by saying:—

'I am mad enough to have formed the impossible dream of a friendship with you through the medium of letters. And if you knew what a formidable being you are in my eyes, you would laugh at my courage.

'I don't suppose you will answer this: I'm told that in actual life you are a complete bourgeois.'

Needless to say, Zola did not answer.

## Chapter Eight

### THE WHITE DRAWING ROOM

This April of 1884 Marie started on a picture of a young peasant girl sitting on the grass in a little copse, a girl supposedly bemused with the dreams of youth. Day after day in the April sunshine Marie went to an orchard at Sèvres to do this picture. As she stood there painting away, the whole spring symphony was in being around her . . . a tremor in the soft air, on every bough a haze of feather green, ‘in the grass, violets, yellow flowers that shine like little suns.’ It is curious that this, the last picture she was to bring to completion, should have been, all unconsciously to herself, symbolic of her own outlook on life when she was younger. So, in a haze of youth and spring had she dreamed of all her hopes that had now crumbled almost to nothing.

But if the writers had cold-shouldered Marie, this year was to bring Bastien-Lepage nearer. His brother, Emile, told her one day how glad Bastien would be to give advice about her paintings. ‘He’d always be delighted to give it you,’ he said.

‘But, alas, I’m not his pupil. . . .’

‘And why not? He would ask nothing better. . . . Believe me, he would be very flattered and very pleased.’

At this moment Bastien was in Algeria for his health which had been getting steadily worse. About her own state of health at this time Marie had no illusions, accepting the situation quite calmly, and merely from time to time referring to it in her diary by some such laconic remark as, ‘Yes, I am consumptive, and it’s getting worse. I am ill, no one knows it, but I am feverish every evening, and everything’s going wrong, and it bores me to talk of it!!’

And another day, speaking of her painting: ‘Hardly anything done, my picture will be badly placed, and I shan’t get a medal. After this I lay in a very hot bath for an hour, and spat blood. “Stupid,” you will say; possibly, but I’ve no more

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sense left. I'm discouraged and half insane with my struggles over everything . . . if this goes on, in eighteen months I shall be done for.'

At the moment she was feeling particularly disgruntled for, after all her extravagant hopes based on her success at last year's Salon, she had now just heard that her picture this spring had only received a number 3—was not even going to be hung on the line. 'Yes,' she exclaims, 'this 3 is difficult to swallow.' She pondered on it, compared her 3 with Breslau's 2, and as she pondered, a terrifying suspicion arose in her mind, a suspicion that, as she considered it, stared at it, hardened into certainty. Yes, here was the truth at last: her failure came, she now confessed it, from 'neither circumstances, nor my family, nor the world but from *my lack of talent*'.

'Oh, never, never, never have I touched the *depths* of despair like to-day . . . Oh! it is too horrible, for there is no appeal . . . I don't see the possibility of working any more, everything seems finished . . . here is the worst, the most humiliating of torments. For one *knows, feels, believes* oneself to be nothing.'

'If this despair lasted, one could not survive it.'

It was just at this moment that she and Maupassant were writing their final letters to each other, and this was perhaps in her mind now when she exclaimed 'And to think I can't even discuss it, exchange ideas, find consolation in talking it over . . . Nothing, no one, no one! . . .

'Happy the single in spirit, happy those who believe in a God on whom they can call! And call for what, seeing that I have no talent?'

'You quite understand. I have touched bottom. It ought to be a pleasure. It would be—if there were spectators of my misery.'

This readiness to act as showman at her own crucifixion, this conviction that spectators would be an assuagement of her suffering, may strike the reader as ridiculous, as the culmination of vanity. But, if so, the reader is wrong. There is undoubtedly an overtone above the life of man, in which, for the world's enhancement, personal suffering is transmuted into the potential substance from which art is drawn. And

of this the more developed spirit is sometimes intuitively aware. In the endeavour to merge personal suffering into the impersonal, half the art of the world has had its birth.

And then, after this despairing day, the incredible happened: she received a special notice to herself in the *Gaulois*: and the *Voltaire*, the *Journal des Arts*, and other papers also praised her. Emile Bastien-Lepage came to the *rue Ampère* telling her her picture was a 'really great success'. 'Not relatively to you or your companions at the studio,' went on the kind fellow, 'but to everyone. Yesterday I saw Ollendorff who told me that if it had been the work of a Frenchman the State would have bought it. "This Monsieur Bashkirtseff shows great power." Then I told him you were a young girl and, I added, pretty. No!! he couldn't get over it. And everyone talking of it as a great success.' Not only this but Emile asked her to sign a permission for Charles Baude (an intimate friend of Bastien) to do an engraving of her picture. Further, five papers asked to be allowed to reproduce it. 'People that I don't know are talking of me,' gasps Marie, 'paying attention to me, forming opinions about me. What happiness!! Oh! it's unbelievable, having wished so for it and waited so long! . . .

'I'm going down to Mama's drawing-room to receive the congratulations of all the imbeciles who think I only paint like any fashionable woman, and who would equally compliment Alice, or any other little fools.

*'Là!*

'I think it's really Rosalie who feels *my success* most. She is wild with joy, speaks to me with the tenderness of an old nurse, and spreads the news right and left like a concierge. For her, something has happened, an event has taken place.'

But the apex of Marie's happiness was the day when Emile brought to her studio a picture collector, a Monsieur Hayem, whose eye had been caught by her pastel the year before at the Salon, and whom this year Emile had come across one day staring at *Le Meeting*.

'What do you think of it?' Emile had asked.

'I think it very good, do you know the artist? Is she young?' In fact 'This Hayem', exclaims Marie, 'has followed me since last year when he noticed the pastel. . . .' And now, actually,

at ten o'clock on a May morning Hayem, this discoverer of young talent, walked into her studio with Emile. 'Odd, isn't it?' writes Marie. 'It doesn't seem possible. I am an artist, and I have talent. And it is really true!' In fact, Monsieur Hayem in conjunction with several magazine editors had plucked her out of hell. In Marie's diary hope succeeds despair, and despair, hope: her moods change like clouds, now massed blackly, now illumined and afloat in sunshine: but to the hypersensitive these moods are familiar, and none the less veracious because they alternate with such violence.

On the afternoon when Monsieur Hayem had come and gone—with the promise, it seems, of buying some of her work, which promise, later, he fulfilled—Marie was too excited to settle to anything. Enwrapped in contentment she sauntered about her rooms feeling 'little shivers of joy in her neck' at the thought of the coming medal: that medal which now, surely, could be regarded as a certainty.

One slight annoyance she had. Several people said *Le Meeting* was so good that it was evident Bastien-Lepage must have helped her. She was annoyed, but at the same time she drew a certain pleasure from these rumours. 'I am flattered at the commotion my picture makes, I am envied, I am slandered, I am someone!'

But while she waited for news of the medal she could not resist ('sincere and posing at the same moment') stirring up her unfortunate mother on the subject. 'Voilà, Mama,' she exclaimed, as she lay inert on a bearskin rug, 'Voilà, Mama, suppose they give the medal of honour to X. . . . naturally I cry out that it is a scandal, a shame, that I'm disgusted. . . .'

'No, no, don't upset yourself like this,' burst out Madame Bashkirtseff taking it all quite seriously, and afraid that Marie in her present state of health would, if anything went wrong, 'die from the least shock.' 'No, no, don't agitate yourself like this. Oh, *mon Dieu*, they have not given it her. It isn't true! She has not got it! And,' she gabbled on, frantically trying to arrange for every contingency, 'if they have given it her, it's on purpose; they know your character, they know you'll be infuriated, and they've done it purposely, and you like a little fool let yourself be taken in. . . .' And on she staggered in her

ridiculous, tender, fumbling way, while Marie lay and ground her teeth at the thought that anyone could imagine she was capable of swallowing anything so palpable. Poor Madame Bashkirtseff never could be made to understand the uselessness of this kind of sympathy. Some friend would perhaps come in one day exclaiming ‘Really the la Rochefoucaulds’ ball was marvellous!’, and Madame Bashkirtseff, seeing disappointment pass over her daughter’s face, would after a few minutes say something, as if by chance, to deprecate this particular party, ‘unless,’ says Marie sarcastically, ‘she undertakes to prove that the ball never took place at all.’

The voting for the medals was fixed for one day at the end of May, and as usual it was for Marie a day of almost unbearable suspense.

‘It is four o’clock. It has just been pouring in torrents. Last year I was certain of having it. . . . This year it is not certain. . . .

‘If it is yes, I shall know this evening about eight o’clock. So I shall go and sit Turkish fashion in the big arm-chair by the window and look out through this window, my elbows on the back of the said arm-chair. And that for four hours!

‘It is twenty past five. . . . In two hours I shall know. . . .

‘Anyhow I shall see the result in to-morrow’s papers.

‘I am exhausted with waiting, feverish, and perspiring. . . .

‘The air is heavy and foggy! My throat is contracted round my jaws and ears.

‘Thirty-five minutes past seven. They are calling me to dinner. It is over.’

She did not get the medal. She was told later that the reason was that the jury had been annoyed at her remarks about them which they had overheard on the day of the medal-giving the year before.

## 2

At the beginning of June, Marie’s old dog, Prater, died, and for a day or two her thoughts turned from her painting to blame herself for her years of neglect of this once favourite animal. ‘Prater grew up with me, they bought him for me in Vienna in 1870: he was three weeks old and used to ram himself

behind the trunks. . . . He was my faithful and devoted dog, crying when I went out and sitting waiting for hours at the window. Then at Rome I became infatuated with another dog, and Prater was taken by Mama, always very jealous of me . . . when I think of my lack of heart! . . . The new dog was called Pincio and he was stolen from me in Paris. Instead of going back to Prater who was inconsolable I was stupid enough to have Coco 1, then the present Coco. It was shameful! It was vile! For four years these two beasts fought each other, and it ended by Prater being shut up in a room at the top of the house where he lived as a prisoner while Coco walked about on the table. . . .

'Oh! I'm a charming wretch with my tender feelings! Oh! despicable creature, I sob as I write, and I think the traces of these tears will gain me the reputation of a kind heart with those who read. I always meant to readopt the unhappy beast, and it never went further than a piece of sugar and a caress as I went by. You should have seen his tail then, that poor docked tail that wagged, wagged, making a circle, it twirled at such a pace.'

'He is dying of old age. Since yesterday I have spent two hours with him, he dragged himself up to me and put his head on my knees.'

'The poor creature is not dead yet; I thought he was because I didn't see him any longer in the room, he had pushed behind a trunk or a bath as he used to at Vienna, and I thought they'd taken him away, not daring to tell me. . . .'

But it was not only for Prater that she reproached herself. Some little time after her father's death her conscience began to torment her for not having gone to Russia when he was dying. 'Yes, I regret not having felt sooner the rush of feeling of this evening.' And he is dead, and it is irreparable . . . I did not do my duty, one ought to do it. . . . Yes, I did not behave well . . . I am ashamed in front of myself which is very painful.' Constantin rose again in her mind; there he was, with his large effective presence, his peculiarly light eyes, his good qualities and his bad, his evasiveness and his charm, his tiresomeness, and his sudden rather touching kindnesses. 'Now that the annoyances are forgotten I remember the good things in my father, his originality, his quick-wittedness. He was

impulsive, and to ordinary people seemed volatile and odd. A little harshness and cunning perhaps . . . but who has no fault, I myself? . . . In a word I blame myself and I am crying.'

Tears gushed now from the poor girl on any and every opportunity, for the truth is that ill as she knew herself to be she was yet a great deal worse than even she herself realized. Though outwardly she still appeared like anyone else her whole being was undergoing an imperceptible dissolution. Death was at her elbow.

## 3

At the end of June Bastien-Lepage came back from Algeria, and from the time of his return Marie's life took on an altogether different aspect. She and her mother were one day just getting into their carriage for a drive in the Bois when Emile came up to the door saying his brother had returned that morning, that he was a shade better but could not go out at all, adding, with tactful cunning, what a pleasure it would be to him if he could tell Marie what a success the photograph of her picture had had in Algeria.

'Then we will go and see him to-morrow,' exclaimed Madame Bashkirtseff.

'You could not give him a greater pleasure,' replied Emile.

One notices, and is surprised that Marie did not notice it herself, how Emile was always surreptitiously trying to give his brother as many opportunities as possible of seeing her. It throws a useful light on his brother's feelings, and lights are needed to clarify the situation that was shortly going to arise between these two, Bastien and Marie.

Bastien lived with his mother and brother in a little house in *rue Legendre*, and there the next day arrived the two Bashkirtseffs.

It is now, as Marie enters Bastien's room, that we first definitely become aware of the change in his feelings towards her. Within the confusion of Marie's untrained mind were not only threads of unmistakable genius but a quality of greatness,

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and Bastien, with his fineness of spirit and penetrating sympathy, would have recognized this and valued her for it: and there is very little doubt he was by now extraordinarily drawn towards her, if not actually on the brink of deep feeling. And when, in all her living gaiety and Parisian *chic*, she came in at the door and he saw her again after these weeks of separation, he got up from his long chair, visibly confused, and began to walk about the room. Marie noticed his embarrassment but no inkling of the real reason for it crossed her mind. Familiar to her as were the easy loves of an Antonelli or a Lardarel, the deep-rooted feeling of a man of Bastien's type—a feeling which, with the knowledge of his inevitable end staring him in the face, he did all he could to hide—was so little known to her that, as her eye fell on him and she noticed how altered from illness he was, she put his embarrassment down to humiliation at this change in his appearance.

'Well! here you are back!' she exclaimed, not knowing what else to say, in her turn embarrassed, so different he looked, hair ruffled above eyes grown too large and glistening, figure shrunken, the whole air that of a very ill man. But in a moment they had both got themselves in hand. He became, writes Marie, 'so friendly, so kind over my painting, keeping on repeating to me not to worry over medals, that the success itself is sufficient.' Marie in her turn began gently to poke fun at him: it was, she remarked, lucky he had been ill as before he had been getting too fat. Bastien loved this kind of thing when it came from Marie, and the atmosphere became cheerful and intimate; and Marie, noticing Emile's pleasure at Bastien's laughter, tossed off more of those flippancies that she so well knew how to make subtly attractive. Bastien lay down on his long chair and made her sit at the foot. His artist's eye took in every detail of her dress, even the handle of her parasol came in for his praise. The entire little visit could not have been more of a success than it was, and when the time came to go Bastien urged them to come again. We cannot but be amused, as the Bashkirtseffs went down the stairs, at hearing the devoted Emile (who, it is easy to see, was quite aware of his brother's feeling for Marie) trying to reinforce this invitation by telling them what happiness it gave his brother to see

them, and shrewdly adding to Marie, 'he says you have a great deal of talent, I swear to you he does!'

Marie went home very calm and content. After worshipping Bastien as an all but inaccessible star there was a curious sweetness in this entering so intimately into the simple, friendly atmosphere of his home.

Two days later, when painting at her woodland picture, Marie, so as to give Bastien a little present, began picking strawberries for a basket, choosing each one with infinite care ('even green ones for love of their colour'), and then with their leaves and a spray of red gooseberries building them up into what she considered a work of art. Holding the basket in her hands she walked along the streets of Sèvres with the attendant Rosalie, and got into the tram: and Rosalie, seeing her sitting there holding the precious object up in her hands so that the air should pass beneath it could not help laughing as she exclaimed, 'If anyone from home saw you now, Mademoiselle!' Marie was surprised herself. 'Is it possible?' she asks, and adds, 'But it is because of his painting, he deserves it.'

A week or so later she stood looking at the reflection of herself in the glass. The whole picture that glistened back at her was ravishing: this new summer dress of grey trimmed with lace at neck and cuffs, and then the hat that went with it, that too with its knot of lace. Looking like this it would be delightful to go and show herself to the appreciative Bastien, but—was it too soon? That was the question. It was only three days ago that she and her mother had been to see him! But no, on the whole she thought it allowable. 'One ought to go there simply in a friendly spirit, as an admirer, out of good nature.'

So off she and her mother went. Bastien's mother, a natural, likeable old woman, was overjoyed to see them, patting Marie's shoulder, admiring her fair piled-up hair. It was a visit full of incident of the most interesting description. Most thrilling it was to see Bastien having his broth and his egg in front of them: to notice his mother running to and fro, doing everythir<sub>g</sub> for him herself rather than let the servant into the room: exciting for Marie to hand him a few things herself and notice how he accepted all this attention as perfectly natural. In

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Marie's eyes his genius radiated from him, illumined his house, his room, his broth, his egg. But on this superb visit there was still more and better to follow. Someone said Bastien's hair wanted cutting, and Madame Bashkirtseff professed herself capable of doing it, bringing forward as proof that she used to cut her son's hair when he was small, and her father's when he was ill. 'Would you like me to cut it? I bring luck!' she exclaimed in fond self-illusion. Amid laughter Bastien accepted the offer. His mother ran for a dressing-gown; Madame Bashkirtseff was given the scissors and began to cut and to trim. Marie wanted to try her hand at it, but for reasons that can be guessed this was more than Bastien could face. He got out of it by telling her she would not take it seriously. She quickly avenged herself on this 'animal': 'Samson and Delilah! my next picture,' she shot at him; and Bastien 'deigned to laughed'. Then Emile suggested trimming his beard, and did it, says Marie, 'slowly, religiously, his hands trembling a little.' With his beard tidied up Bastien looked far less ill: his mother was enraptured: 'At last I've got a glimpse of you,' she cried, 'my boy, my dear little boy, my dear child!' Marie could enter into all this, could appreciate such genuine simplicity, and Madame Lepage's real affection for her 'great fellow of a son'. 'They are splendid people,' Marie wrote that night in her diary.

At intervals Marie remembered her own health, and early this July dashed off at seven o'clock one morning to see Potain. He said she ought to go to the Eaux-Bonnes, and gave her a letter to his colleague there. After leaving him she opened his letter and, besides information on her physical condition, read with interest that she was 'the most imprudent and undisciplined invalid in the world.' It was not yet eight o'clock so she decided to visit another doctor in the *rue de l'Echiquier*, which she did. He warned her she was most seriously ill and said she positively must go and see the famous Grancher. She agreed . . . and her diary turns back to her painting. She had a new idea for a picture: a public bench with carefully chosen street types sitting on it. She would have her canvas, so she decided, inside a *fiacre*, and then sit and work at it there. As usual, association with Bastien had quickened the perceptive antennæ of her mind, and now, as she looked at even the most

commonplace aspects of street life round the *rue Ampère* there came again that sense of a curtain drawn back revealing unsuspected beauty and import where before all had been dreary and meaningless: again there rose within her that curious tremor of excitement, of joy. No longer were the streets merely a collection of heterogeneous men and women; now objects and people had become transparent, and even the very rubbish of humanity revealed itself as significant, as holding some precious fluid of being. All, even the decrepit, the diseased, the derelict, the wastrel, the drunkard, all had their value and their place, and by their existence enriched the world. ‘Sometimes one sees really *nothing* in life, and sometimes . . . I’m beginning again to love everything! everything that surrounds me!

‘It’s like a flood of life pouring in!’

‘Have you looked at it? . . . the street and the people going by. All that one sees on a bench, what romance! What drama! . . . look carefully towards five or six o’clock in the evening.’

Then, her thoughts turning to her painting, ‘That’s it, that’s it! . . .

‘Yes, yes, yes, perhaps I shan’t do it, but my spirit is calmed. I am dancing on one foot. . . .

‘I shall find something gay and delightful even in death.’

Meanwhile she was absorbed in the thought of her street picture, and would walk for hours together looking for the most suitable public bench to act as background for her collected group of *déclassés*. The subject pleased her beyond measure, so much so that, ‘here I am,’ she writes, ‘filled with insane anxiety at the thought of this discovered treasure—supposing it doesn’t come off! If I’m not going to be able to do it, or if the weather, if. . . .

‘Listen, if I’ve not got talent, then Heaven is making fun of me, for it inflicts on me all the tortures of artists of genius. . . . Alas!’

The next day she wrote out her will. ‘Possessing nothing myself,’ she began, ‘I enjoin my family to carry out my wishes.’ In short, Aunt Sophie’s money again, and this time more of it than ever; of that during her life Marie had never stinted



*Photo Gilletta, Nice.*

STATUE OF MARIE BASHKIRTSEFF

By MICHEL DE TARNOWSKY

In the Musée des Beaux Arts, Nice



herself, and in her fixed determination to preserve her own memory she acted on the same principle. 'A kind of chapel, so she wrote, was to be erected to her memory near the Champs Elysées. It was to be big enough to hold forty people; it was to have a good organ, and round the chapel there was to be a garden in which was to be placed a statue of herself by Saint-Marceaux. Each year, on the anniversary of her death, one of the foremost singers of the day was to give a special performance there. The Almighty had given her her body only to take it away again, but she, Marie, would build herself a monumental body of stone and mortar that posterity could not ignore.

It is usual, it is certainly more graceful, to leave such memorials to be erected or not according to the inclinations of those who survive one; but Marie thought otherwise.

Further, she asked that an annual prize should be instituted for either painting or sculpture, and, finally, her mother and aunt were adjured, after these vast demands on their resources, to succour 'the poor during the winter as much as possible'.

The morning after writing her will Marie was up and out at five o'clock with Rosalie collecting street sitters for her picture. She would pick out those she wanted, and then Rosalie would go up to them and make the arrangements. It was an embarrassing proceeding, but it had to be done.

Meanwhile, the visits to Bastien continued. Aunt Sophie had found in him yet another person to take care of and scheme for. He longed, in these hot August days for a refrigerator to have close by his bed, so *les mères* procured him one. Then he must share the milk that Marie, ordered by the doctor, had each day from a goat. The Bashkirtseffs had their own goat which was kept tethered in the garden, and on such friendly terms had the two families become that when Bastien felt he wanted the goat's milk he sent round for it. Marie was charmed.

Her life now took on at moments the atmosphere of a dream: overcome with weakness she would lie down, and then find that, most unaccountably, she had been asleep for hours. There would come to her the peculiar sensation of standing outside life: at times all power seemed to leave her, 'I struggle

on and I fight, but this morning I really thought I had reached the point of giving in,' but no, a few moments after, a little trickle of vitality seemed to flow through her and she was able to set to at her painting. Of this increased illness and weakness she said nothing to her family. There was no point in discussing it, she did not wish to. 'I am ill, that is enough.' Aunt Sophie was preparing to go to Russia. Marie gave her no enlightenment as to her own condition, and Aunt Sophie departed.

The Bashkirtseffs' visits every day or two to the *rue Legendre* seem to have gone on steadily. These visits were a feature in Marie's life: something unusual, snug, and wholly delightful. Then, about the middle of August, Bastien seemed better. Félix, the Lepage's man servant, coming round at four o'clock one morning to the *rue Ampère* to fetch the goat's milk, brought the news that his master, carried to and from a carriage in an arm-chair, had been able to get to the Bois. To hear this was to Marie like a little draught of chill air percolating into the warm and precious intimacy of the last few weeks. 'In short,' she writes, 'we are going to lose him because he is better. Yes, this good time looks as if it is coming to an end. One can't go and see a man who goes out. But don't let us exaggerate. He has been to the Bois, but carried in an arm-chair because he is lying down. That does not mean he goes out.' A few days later Marie thought she would go round to see Bastien, but so weak that day was she that all she could do, so she writes, was to put on 'a linen dress, without my corsets.' She and Madame Bashkirtseff were received by Bastien's mother with reproaches. 'Three days! three days without coming to see us—but it's dreadful!'

'Well,' exclaimed Emile, as they went into Bastien's room, 'well, it's all over then! What—we are no longer friends?' While '*he—himself*', underlines Marie, remarked, 'Well, you're dropping me then? Ah! that's not nice of you!' and he added that 'never, never could we come too often'. 'He likes me, is pleased with me, I interest him', wrote Marie both touched and flattered. After believing he did not like her at all, to find he appreciated her so much was surprising and enchanting.

All this time Marie had taken it for granted that eventually

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Bastien would recover, but towards the end of August, Baude, Bastien's great friend, when one evening he was with the Bashkirtseffs, told Marie's mother the truth. Bastien could never recover: he was dying.

'Then,' writes Marie, 'it is all over.'

'Is it possible? . . .

'All the confused things that dazzled and filled my mind have come to a standstill and grouped themselves round this black point.' The surprise was as great as the shock.

'This is new, a man . . . a great man, a great artist and . . . in short you know what he is. . . . Condemned to death. . . .

'I can't put two words together.'

Meanwhile Bastien does not seem to have realized that Marie was as ill as he was himself. To look at that laughing Greuze face no one would have realized it. Now, with this knowledge of Bastien's end in her mind, Marie's thoughts circled round him with protective tenderness. Did he seem in need of an extra pillow, a small one to fit in among the others—she brought him one, with a cover made from her own handkerchiefs on which she had embroidered a 'J'. Did he refuse to eat the repulsive-looking powdered meat the doctor had ordered—Marie herself ate it in front of him as an encouragement. She would drive with her mother to the Bois to the place where Bastien went now almost daily, and sitting down on the grass by him would talk, and get him to talk, of anything that would bring a little interest into his drawn face; or, crouched by the side of the lake, she would boil up chocolate for him to drink. At these times she used to wear a black shawl, and, finding it pleased Bastien, she would drape and redrape its folds around her, posed against the heavy-foliaged trees of late summer. Down on them one day as they sat there in the Bois came the rain, but as Bastien seemed amused Marie took no notice of it: 'there I was in the wet with the assurance of a girl of sixteen, my hair in front all coming out of curl.' Naturally that evening she was shaken with coughing.

After these meetings in the Bois it became the custom for Marie and Bastien to drive back in one carriage, and her mother and Bastien's in another. 'This monster of a Bastien-Lepage tries to look after me, he wants me to be cured of my

cough in a month; he does up my jacket and is always anxious to know if I'm well covered up.'

Often during these days Marie would again reproach herself for not having gone to her father when he was dying. 'It is,' she explains, 'since Bastien-Lepage has been here and that we so often go and see him, heaping on him every kind of attention and spoiling endearment....' Well, Constantin had gone and nothing could be done about it, but Bastien was still with them, and he, certainly, had no cause to complain.

By September Marie was worse in every way. She was doing a drawing for the *Figaro*, 'but with interruptions of an hour at a time... a wretched feverishness, I can't do any more. I have never been so ill, but as I say nothing about it I go out and work. What is the good of talking about it?... Can chattering about it do any good?'

In a week or two Bastien too was far worse. More often now it was a case of Marie and her mother going, not to meet him in the Bois, but to sit by his bed. 'We don't know what to do,' writes Marie apropos of these visits, 'whether to go away or to remain looking at this man crying out with pain, then smiling at us. For us to go away is to give the impression of his being very ill: and to remain as if it were a show while he twists about with suffering!... he is his shadow, I too am half a shadow.'

Sitting by this young man, lying there in front of her attenuated, beaten, Marie was lacerated with the sadness of it. The strands that made up this feeling, that drew her to him, were not perhaps exactly those of love, more, it appears, were they those, as she herself says, of 'a great, profound tenderness,' but with anyone as ill and desperate as she was all ordinary values were necessarily displaced, her whole outlook different to what it would normally have been: love or not love, who can say: it was not a moment for precise docketing and labelling. In her bed at night when she thought of Bastien lying in his long drawn-out suffering in the *rue Legendre*, the tears would run down her face. 'I should like to be there always. And when his face contracts I should like to take his hand and remain like that for hours on end. He looks so unhappy that he is like a child with his gentle beautiful eyes, and one would

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like to take his head and caress it.... What a sad tender dream. I fell asleep crying.'

Can this be Marie? Yes, it is Marie, and she has not changed, it is only that we see her now in different circumstances to any she has been in before. In fact this kneeling before Bastien was fully in keeping with her creed, for always in spirit she had knelt to genius, and to see genius reduced to this piteous child state was what had broken her.

By the middle of October Marie could hide her own weakness no longer, she could not even crawl round to the *rue Legendre*. 'I have not been able to go out. I am definitely ill, though not in bed....

'Oh! God, God, my picture, my picture.'

Julien came to see her. 'Then they've told him I'm ill,' she exclaims. 'Alas! how can it be hidden? And how to go to Bastien-Lepage?'

But when Bastien heard she could no longer come to him he determined that at all costs he would go to her. It was the only way he could show his devotion, but in that one way he could, exhausting and painful though it would be. So, half carried up the stairs by his brother, he appeared in the doorway of the great drawing-room of the *rue Ampère*, came vacillating across the carpet between the palms and the ottomans, and sank into an armchair. Marie was in another, and there, barely able to speak to each other from exhaustion, they sat, while as the hours slowly crept by the daylight shifted and changed about the room. However barely one records the scene it still unescapably bears the impress of one of the more emotional acts of a Dumas play. Not that the two actors in this living tragedy aimed at any romantic effect, far from it: weak and dazed with illness, they merely found comfort in having each other to share this strange adventure that they were both being forced to undertake. Certainly, Marie still dressed herself to please Bastien's senses. 'Oh, if I could paint!' he exclaimed one day as his eye fell on her lovely medley of cream lace and gleaming white plush.

Though the presence of Bastien, as one of the famous men for whom Marie had craved, was in a sense a triumph, it equally emphasized the fact that he was the sole representative of all

those she had so longed to draw into her orbit. That was the outward, the visible aspect. But as regards the inward and invisible his presence was a tribute to her worth, for here was with little doubt the finest, the most spiritually minded man whom she had met drawn to her side as she stood on the brink of leaving the world, inevitably so drawn by a fundamental response of his being to hers. The dying Bastien's devotion was a greater panache than she realized.

In this big drawing-room Marie's life was now spent. Sometimes she would be on the sofa . . . then, getting up, she would move to an arm-chair . . . then, after a time creep back again to the sofa. So her days passed. She had violent attacks of fever that drained her strength. Potain, or 'sous-Potain', as she called his colleague, would come in to see her, but neither of them could do anything. 'You see,' she remarks to her imaginary readers, 'I do nothing. All the time I've got a fever. My doctors are two nice kind of idiots.' 'There's no reason,' she goes on, 'why I should bore you with my illnesses. The truth of the matter is I can do nothing!!!'

'All is over.'

'There it is then, the end of all my miseries. So many aspirations, so many desires, projects . . . to die at twenty-four on the threshold of everything!' And then, her mind still dwelling on the cat-and-mouse game she so curiously believed the Almighty to be always playing with her, she adds: 'I foresaw it, God not being able without partiality to give me what is necessary for my life is going to kill me.'

She had no conventional views on death: occasionally, when trying to focus her mind on the unknown in front of her, she had a moment's trepidation, but only a moment's. She was too intuitively intelligent to feel any real cause for alarm, and her passion for life was so great that, paradoxically, it included death and what lay beyond it. Faced with her end her personal integrity still held, and far from adopting a death-bed attitude, one of the last entries in her diary is to express her satisfaction that Potain still comes to see her in spite of the fact that there is really nothing he can do. 'This man is in no more need of money, and if he comes sometimes it is because he is a little interested in me.' Julien too came to see her. She had only

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to be ill for all his kindness to come flooding back, and in he would come bringing with him drawings and sketches done at the studio that he thought might interest her; and too he was probably glad, by bringing them, to have something definite to discuss, for the truth is it was difficult now for these two to find much to say to each other.

Living now entirely in the drawing-room surrounded by the heterogeneous objects that filled it, Marie realized it was a most inadequate background against which to die. And very shortly the big salon underwent a metamorphosis: yards of white material were stretched across the walls, interspersed here and there with draperies of white silk and white fur, and to complete the effect, about the room were placed great bunches of white roses.

### 4

By the middle of October Marie was a great deal weaker, and though Madame Bashkirtseff still managed to delude herself with the belief that she would recover, Aunt Sophie had nevertheless been sent for from Russia. We do not hear of Marie being in actual pain: she lay there quietly, while slowly the sap of life ebbed from her young body. It is easier for the young than for the old to die gracefully, to die and yet still to charm. There were times when, from fever, Marie became unconscious, and times in between when she lay in a half dream in the midst of this white nest she had brought into being round her. ‘I see people,’ she writes, ‘they speak, I reply, but I am no longer on earth—a tranquil indifference, not unhappy, a little like an opium trance.’

Still the faithful Bastien paid his visits; and still Marie tried to keep on with her diary. We come to the last two entries she was capable of making.

‘Sunday, October 19th. Tony and Julien to dinner.

‘Monday, October 20th. In spite of magnificent weather Bastien-Lepage came here instead of going to the Bois. He can hardly walk at all now; his brother props him up under each arm, nearly carries him. And once in his armchair the

poor fellow lies there done for. The misery of us both! And how many concierges are in good health! Emile is a splendid brother. He it is who carries Jules on his shoulders up and down the stairs to their third floor. As for me, Dina shows me an equal devotion. For the last two days I have had my bed in the drawing-room; but it's very big and divided by screens, poufs, and the piano so that one does not notice it. It's too difficult for me getting up the stairs.'

Not only could Marie not keep up her diary any longer, but the time came when she could not see Bastien any more, did not in fact wish to. In a few days a sudden change came over her, the face that looked back at her from the glass had altered almost beyond recognition. She drew her white shawl round her, shrank back within its folds, and waited.

As she crouched there in her arm-chair she had plenty of time to look back over the past, plenty of time to dwell on the discrepancy between what she had imagined her life was going to be and what it had actually proved to be: before her in this silent room, round which the life of Paris hummed, lay her every ambition broken; and often the others as they came in would notice the tears streaming down her face.

On the night of the 31st of October Marie was so weak that it was realized she could not live through it. Paul had been sent for, and was at this moment in the train on his way across Europe from Russia. It was hoped he might arrive that night. Marie's mother and Aunt Sophie kept vigil in the drawing-room while Bojidar and one or two other friends waited in another room. In the drawing-room, by the minute light of a candle by Marie's bed, Aunt Sophie went to and fro making up the fire, and as she piled up the logs, each time the room again leapt into being, amorphous shadows wavering over wall and ceiling. The moments passed... and passed... and still Paul did not come....

At last, through the slats of the Venetian shutters, came the first suffused glimmer of dawn. Marie opened her eyes and saw the candle by her bed burnt almost to its socket. 'We shall go out together,' she murmured.

The interior of the Russian church in the *rue Daru* was illuminated as if to receive a monarch, and along the streets there slowly drew towards it a funeral procession. Bright autumn sunshine fell on the massed up wreaths, on the six white horses, on their housings of silver. On the white velvet that covered the coffin itself had been laid one green palm leaf. All this emphasis of a young death, the white horses, their silver trappings, the palm leaf, the folds of white velvet, would have responded exactly to what Marie, with her romantic self-idealization, would have considered appropriate. In all probability she had herself arranged these details: the whole thing was, one admits it with reluctance, a shade overdone; it was all in the tradition of that fatal bed at Nice, of that equally fatal skating-rink dress with its floating fronds of ostrich feather. To be sensational when alive is unfortunate enough, but to be deliberately sensational when dead is more than unfortunate.

To the onlooker this white and silver coach passing along the sun-bathed streets must have possessed almost a touch of Cinderella's coach; but I do not regret, looking at it from a certain angle, that this, our last parting from Marie, should be tinged with the fantastic, have the suggestion more of a pageant than a funeral; it is all in keeping with her capricious, individual attitude to life, with that determination not to conform to the normal which has in it something essentially vital and refreshing; it bears out her declaration, 'I shall find something gay and delightful even in death.'

Five weeks after Marie's death Bastien too died.

Needless to say, the chapel Marie had asked for was built. Emile Bastien-Lepage designed it, and there in the churchyard of Passy its Byzantine cupola is to be seen, and there, in the vault, lies Marie. She had, as we know, never spared Aunt Sophie's purse, and the chapel must have strained it severely

and whether for that reason, or because the house in the *rue Ampère* was now too big for them, Aunt Sophie, Madame Bashkirtseff, and Dina moved into another, one in the *rue de Prony*.

In one sense they had lost Marie for ever, in another they now knew and possessed her as they never had before. As we have seen, she had told them very little of her inner life, but now, on the pages of these piles of exercise books, the doors of her inner self were thrown wide open: they could go in and out as they pleased, stay as long as they wished, examine and ponder at their leisure. It must have been a peculiar and poignant experience, this breaking into the hitherto locked room of her mind, this sudden intimacy in place of her life-long reticence. So closely had their lives been knit with hers that in reading her diary they were able practically to retrace their own lives step by step. One can imagine them sitting in the drawing room in their black clothes, passing the exercise books round to each other, and then sinking back, absorbedly reading and reading: almost, as they read, the past must have seemed the present, and themselves sitting there, these three mournful women, some dismal dream which in another moment would vanish. Here were a thousand past incidents which they had shared leaping back again into vivid life: here were the very sentences, the very words sounding again in the air . . . here they were at the race-meeting at Nice, and that *beau garçon*, the Duke of Hamilton, walking about in his maroon-coloured hat, whistling. Here was the evening when they had all shaken with laughter over Chocolat's account of his conversation with Antonelli. Here was Lardarel coming into the room with that enchanting air of his, talking, laughing, striking his head with his hands and crying out '*O mon Empereur!*'—but the reader of all this looked up . . . there still sat the other two in their dismal black . . . all this had happened years ago . . . and Marie was dead.

One can imagine, with Marie gone, what an anticlimax life must have seemed for these three who were left, for Marie had been the pivot round which they had all revolved. As for Dina, though Marie had seldom made her her confidante,

the two had been close companions; Marie had found the friends, the amusements, the *modus vivendi*, and Dina had followed in so far as she was capable. Whether from the general flatness now of her life or for some other reason, two years after Marie's death Dina married that great-uncle, the Comte de Toulouse-Lautrec, whom we read of several years before as having so much admired her. When they married he was thirty-four years the elder, and very shortly after he died, and Dina returned to live with Aunt Sophie and Madame Bashkirtseff.

It may be remembered that Aunt Sophie had always had a deep affection for the roulette board, though Marie, with the relentless sternness of youth, had always as much as she could put a stop to her aunt's activities in this direction; but now there was no one to interfere, and constantly Aunt Sophie would be seen going upstairs to dress preparatory to setting off for the tables: it was a tiny pulse of excitement beating in the centre of her now purposeless life. Gladly she responded to this urge: she went more and more, and through the seduction of the roulette board more and more of her property in Russia slipped through her fingers, slipped and disappeared, and with it the money on which the family had been accustomed to depend.

The fact that Marie was dead did not make her mother live for her any the less: she constituted herself the guardian of her daughter's fame. Bereft of this child she had adored, she yet, in her fixed devotion, wished to live to a hundred, 'for when I am no longer here,' she said, 'who will look after my daughter's fame?' She was not intelligent enough to realize that it is just the dead famous whom the world itself always looks after. For when Madame Bashkirtseff said this, Marie's wish had at last been fulfilled, she and her diary had become famous: the publication of that pile of exercise books had given her when dead the accolade that life had denied her. Not that the entire diary had been published, that would have meant ten volumes, and no publisher would consider it, but, edited by André Theuriet, a section of the diary appeared in two volumes in 1887 entitled *Journal de Marie Bashkirtseff*, and it became, as we have already seen, one of the most read and

talked of books of the day. As in England it had a sponsor in William Gladstone, so in France it had one in Maurice Barrès, who upraised Marie in the eyes of the young writers of the day, speaking of her as the author who possessed 'the only real literary talent' of his time, for 'her manner of feeling was incomparable'.

Gradually the familiar figures round Madame Bashkirtseff disappeared. Aunt Sophie was the first to go, dying of consumption. Then, a few years later Dina died too, and of the same disease. Finally, Paul followed them. Meanwhile, a fresh generation, Paul's four children, had grown up, and the son, Nicholas, and two of his sisters came to live with Madame Bashkirtseff at Nice. But this attempt on the part of Madame Bashkirtseff to remake her life with a new family was not altogether a success; there were constant quarrels, which ended, one evening, in Nicholas committing suicide. His two sisters returned to their home, and they and their mother were engulfed in the Russian Revolution and were never heard of again. The remaining sister married and has a daughter who is said slightly to resemble Marie.

Madame Bashkirtseff, an old woman, emotionally worn out with all the tragedies and upheavals of her life, was left alone at Nice. Leaving the big house, she betook herself to the pavilion in the garden and lived there entirely. As we have seen, Aunt Sophie's activities at roulette had much reduced the Romanoff income, and in the Great War and the Russian Revolution still more was lost. In her garden pavilion Madame Bashkirtseff had one servant who came in for the day only. Pet cats and monkeys alone shared her long solitude. We have a photograph of her in later life looking, with her black shawl pinned round her head, and her despairing gaze, like some refugee. And that indeed is what she was, a refugee from the past. The Nice that she had first known had vanished like a scene from the stage, and here was a new scene in which she had no part, no place. During these years the old Nice had been

swallowed and absorbed into the Nice we know to-day, and with this change the value of a house and garden on the *Promenade des Anglais* had gone up incredibly. If Madame Bashkirtseff had chosen to sell them she could probably have made enough to live extremely comfortably in Paris among her friends. But she did not choose. This was the place Marie had lived in and loved, this the house, this the pavilion, this the garden that had been part and parcel of her existence, and while she, her mother, lived they should not be touched, should not be pulled down, built on, and obliterated from the face of the earth. One can imagine the propositions that must have been made her to persuade her to sell; but it is not building prospectors who can best gauge the tenacity of human affections: within Madame Bashkirtseff was a flame of devotion more powerful in its steady burning than the most fantastic sum of money that could be offered her. And there, a heart-broken custodian of the past, she lived on in poverty and loneliness. Foolish? Probably. But foolishness and devotion had always been Marie Babanine's chief characteristics, and we cannot blame her for being what she was. People are not born foolish by choice. If instead of comfort elsewhere she preferred poverty so long as she could loiter along the familiar garden paths in company with her cats and monkeys, dreaming of the past, why should we blame her? This clinging to house and garden, this self-immolation to the dead were part of the romanticism that had been the mainspring of her life. It is not wise ever to pass a conclusive judgment on anyone: who can know in its entirety the obscure intolerable suffering that may make necessary some ridiculous anodyne which enables another spirit at all to endure this garment of humanity into which it has been thrust?

At times Madame Bashkirtseff would go and sit on the terrace, looking down on the motors as one after the other they went skirring along the Promenade . . . why did this new race, this race of gazelle-eyed boys and lip-salved girls that had sprung up since the War, why did they rush along at this lunatic pace, so different to the leisurely swaying rhythm of the carriage of the past: had they found something in life so well worth having that they were frantic to reach it, or did

they, on the contrary, find life so intolerable that they were always playing with the illusion that they were escaping from it? Possibly, now and again, one or other of this new generation as they shot by glanced up, and glimpsed for an instant an old, grief-trampled face looking down on them, a face which like thousands of others that they passed was for an instant seen and then not seen. But of the long history stretching away behind that saddened mask, of which history it was the epitome, they knew nothing.

## 8

Is Marie Bashkirtseff really worthy of the place among the famous which she has attained? For famous she undoubtedly is: she was determined to survive and she has survived.

As for her character she was spoilt, egoistic, worldly, and vain. But that she was spoilt was not her fault but that of her family; her egoism was already beginning to give before the realization of the sufferings of others; if she accepted the world's terminology she was yet perceptive of spiritual values; and her vanity was in great part the mental growing pains of the young. Growing up is not an easy process. And, too, Marie never suffered from the final vanity, that of believing oneself not to be vain, of imagining that one is superior to the universal and natural emotions that sway the human heart. That is the most insidious vanity, the fatal vanity that dims the spiritual eye. And from that failing Marie essentially did not suffer; she was never deceived as to her own motives, she never once flinched from exposing herself. To say her sincerity has never been surpassed is not to say a small thing. When one thinks of her at the age of twelve setting out to record her every reaction to life—and this at a time when self-revelatory writing was not usual—when one thinks of this child realizing that the smallest the most trivial happenings if faithfully and justly recorded have, if not an immediate, yet an ultimate value; when one thinks of the steady determination needed daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, to accomplish this stupendous task, then one realizes that she possessed

## THE WHITE DRAWING ROOM

qualities that are certainly rare. And, too, one must remember that when she set out on this long literary pilgrimage she had believed it was to be a record of triumph succeeding triumph; when she discovered that her journey through life was almost the very opposite to what she had imagined, she recorded her failures with the same relentless veracity.

She had immense capacity for suffering—in itself one of the signs of greatness—and she suffered profoundly. That her sufferings were chiefly, though not entirely, those of mortified vanity does not detract from their pungency. Suffering is suffering.

And in her whole nature there was nothing ignoble. She was generous, kind-hearted, pitiful. One of her great charms, one might say one of her great virtues, was that for those around her she enriched life, intensified it, made it glow. To judge of her as an artist during those few scurried years of work—painting before she had learned to draw, exhibiting when she was still a student—would be not only unfair but impossible. But she possessed all the emotional equipment of the true artist; hypersensitiveness, great depth of feeling, an undoubted strain of mysticism, and at least the elements of genius. The charge may be made against her that at times she was emotional to the point of hysteria, but in her case it was merely the pathological disturbances of a highly organized and highly sexed girl in her early teens. Her balance was, in a sense, remarkable, for however harrowing her experiences she could always attain to enough mental detachment accurately to record and analyse them. Not to have strong emotions is to be only half alive.

At the age of thirteen Marie wrote of love with a simplicity and poignancy that few grown men or women can ever attain to. Finally, she faced death as we should all face it; without fear and with what gaiety she could muster.

To assess the true value of unusual personalities they must be judged in the setting of their own era. For a girl in our time to write with the outspokenness of Marie would not be remarkable, for outspokenness is now accepted and encouraged, but for Marie to write as she did when she did was absolutely iconoclastic: hence the shock and excitement that her diary

caused in the eighties: hence the praise due to her as an originator of new values, as a liberator from out-worn attitudes of mind. Not to realize this is not to realize her chief gift to the world. Every new attitude of mind of the race, at first fluid and progressive, finally congeals and hardens, and it is then that the mental iconoclast, the liberator, is needed. These iconoclasts are seldom women, and Marie is perhaps the sole example of a child (for half her diary belongs to her childhood) who has acted as a mind liberator. Taking into account the stir her diary caused in Europe and America the effects of this mental liberation must have been considerable, therefore what this child accomplished was remarkable. Consider the shocked pomposity of Mr. Gladstone's reactions to those innocent pages; and these were the reactions of an exceptionally brilliant man, and one who was Marie's chief supporter. There seems to have been a failure at that time among both men and women to perceive that priggishness and virtue have no relation to each other. It was a generation that needed a Marie Bashkirtseff to demand: 'What is the good of lying and posing?'

But in her hurried passage through life Marie gave, apart from propaganda, another gift to the world—an autobiography of immaturity, and the world at once recognized it for what it was: a gift of value. It is one of the most genuine documents of the slow mortification of a human spirit that we possess. It is an unsurpassed record of the gay certainties of youth becoming gradually bewildered and broken before the onslaughts of life. One cannot deny that this girl, who when she died was to all intents and purposes little more than a child, has given—limited and simple as is her work—a world performance that still lives, that will I think continue to live because it contains within it the variegated dance of reality, is instinct with the impulsion of life.

Taken all in all it is right that she should have her place among the famous. She has earned it.

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